
The Rehabilitation Act:

Outcomes for Transition-Age Youth



National Council on Disability
October 28, 2008

National Council on Disability
1331 F Street, NW, Suite 850
Washington, DC 20004

The Rehabilitation Act: Outcomes for Transition-Age Youth

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Letter of Transmittal

October 28, 2008

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the National Council on Disability (NCD), I am pleased to submit this report titled *The Rehabilitation Act: Outcomes for Transition Age Youth* during National Disability Employment Awareness Month. This report is a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the Rehabilitation Act on the employment and postsecondary education outcomes of eligible transition-age youth. The Council is deeply appreciative of your efforts on behalf of people with disabilities. We hope that the recommendations contained herein will aid the administration in realizing the full potential of “America’s People, America’s Talent, America’s Strength.”

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, together with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, set in motion policy changes that have allowed many thousands of children and youth with disabilities in the United States the opportunity to gain the educational and vocational skills needed to transition to living, working, and participating as adults in community life.

NCD undertook this study to examine the extent to which the vocational rehabilitation system’s (VR) existing federal/state structure promotes:

- the delivery of effective transition services to adolescents and young adults with disabilities;
- the long-term results of VR’s investment in postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities;
- and the effectiveness of collaborative efforts among vocational rehabilitation, secondary and postsecondary education, and other service systems in the planning and delivery of transition services.

The public sector VR program has been providing employment-related services to young adults with disabilities for decades, and currently serves more than 50,000 youth each year, but the results of the study confirm that relatively little is known about the extent and effectiveness of VR transition services. As a result, state VR agencies continue to devote substantial resources to this population without the benefit of methodologically sound evaluation approaches. These approaches need to be used to assess the long-term impact of services on the employment status and economic self-

sufficiency, validated evidence-based service delivery approaches that form the basis of program planning, or systematic procedures for identifying new promising practices.

The ever-increasing number of transition-age youth with disabilities who will exit secondary education programs and attempt to enter the workforce over the next decade will create tremendous challenges for VR agencies. While many current service delivery approaches hold promise, little empirical information is available that will allow VR agencies to accurately predict the amount and type of services required to assist transition-age youth to meet their employment goals, or the outcomes that should be anticipated for individuals served through the program.

NCD stands ready to work with you, members of your Administration, and the leadership in Congress as you work toward improving our nation's vocational rehabilitation system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John R. Vaughn", written over a horizontal dashed line.

John R. Vaughn
Chairperson

(The same letter of transmittal was sent to the President Pro Tempore of the U.S. Senate and the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.)

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Executive Summary

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, together with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, set in motion policy changes that have allowed many thousands of children and youth with disabilities in the United States the opportunity to gain the educational and vocational skills needed to transition to living, working, and participating as adults in community life. The debate continues as to whether these laws have gone far enough in making the changes needed to enable youth with disabilities to leave high school, attain postsecondary education and training, and achieve employment rates and levels of wages comparable to their peers without disabilities.

In providing services to transition-age youth with disabilities who are still in secondary education, vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies collaborate with state education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs), and institutions of higher education (IHEs). The collaboration that occurs is based on meeting statutory requirements governing the vocational rehabilitation (VR) services program, the methods of ensuring services and transition services requirements in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the implementation of specific agency operations or initiatives.

To fulfill these mandates, the federal/state VR program provides direct services to tens of thousands of transition-age youth. In addition, the program collaborates with multiple federal and state partners to implement comprehensive transition programs that reach many other individuals served through special education, workforce development, mental health, developmental disability, and other service delivery systems.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to synthesize both quantitative and qualitative data on the impact that the Rehabilitation Act has had on the employment and postsecondary education outcomes of eligible transition-age youth. The study examines the extent to which VR's existing federal/state structure promotes the delivery of effective transition services to adolescents and young adults with disabilities, the long-term results of VR's

investment in postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities, and the effectiveness of collaborative efforts among vocational rehabilitation, secondary and postsecondary education, and other service systems in the planning and delivery of transition services.

Summary of the Methodology

The study design contained four components. First, a comprehensive literature review was conducted to identify and review prior studies that focused on the efficacy of VR services for adolescents and young adults with disabilities. In this component of the research design, various existing databases were assessed, analyzed, and queried to obtain data related to transition outcomes that are directly or indirectly tied to use of VR services by youth with disabilities.

Second, a series of structured qualitative interviews were conducted with key stakeholders to gather additional data on the effect of VR transition services. The key stakeholders who provided information included federal Department of Education (ED) and Department of Labor (DOL) officials, state and local VR transition specialists, local education transition specialists, former consumers of VR transition services, current transition-age youth who may or may not receive VR services, and parents.

Third, the results of the data-collection activities were presented at an expert panel meeting on April 23, 2008, of federal and state VR and ED representatives, DOL representatives, representatives from national disability organizations, nationally renowned researchers in the field of transition, parent advocates, and transition-age youth in Arlington, Virginia. The purpose of the meeting was to receive feedback on and validate the preliminary findings, and to generate recommendations for policymakers to improve transitional services in general and the involvement of VR and other adult service agencies in the transition process.

Fourth, three preliminary drafts of the study report were developed for review by the National Council on Disability (NCD) Employment Committee and staff and

submitted on January 31, 2008, and April 2, 2008. Based on feedback and guidance provided, a final report was submitted on July 3, 2008.

Findings

The following findings are reported according to the five research questions that guided the study.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: How effective has VR been in transitioning students from school to work and/or from school to higher education? Specifically, what short-term and long-term results are achieved through the delivery of vocational rehabilitation services, particularly with respect to students transitioning from school to work and school to postsecondary education?

The number of transition-age youth served by VR has increased steadily over the past five years. For these individuals, employment rates and earnings appear reasonable given the age and prior work experience of this population. At the same time, it appears that VR is serving only a small percentage of youth who could potentially benefit from transition services. Unfortunately, available data is insufficient to develop precise estimates of the number, characteristics, or service needs of transition-age youth potentially able to access and benefit from VR services.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: How have particular VR services correlated with successful employment outcomes, and how do existing definitions of successful case outcomes influence the range and content of transition services provided in the field? What are the payoffs from VR's substantial investments in postsecondary training of consumers with disabilities?

Prior research efforts have not documented the effectiveness of specific VR services in promoting employment outcomes of transition-age youth. While the results of multiple demonstrations reveal promising practices, no rigorous studies using experimental designs or comparison groups have been completed. Available data

clearly confirms that VR agencies provide considerable support for individuals with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education. Further, prior research documents the increased success that results from participation in postsecondary education and training, although problems related to selection bias in study samples limit the usefulness of these investigations.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: To what extent has the Department of Education's Monitoring Redesign Initiative promoted the transition of students from school to employment and school to postsecondary education within the vocational rehabilitation system?

The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) redesign of its state monitoring process has put in place a system that appears to work closely with state agencies in reviewing performance in relation to state plan goals and objectives. Performance strengths are noted. Promising practices of potential value to other states are identified, collected, and disseminated. Performance issues are also identified and corrective action plans are developed. The actual impact of the monitoring redesign in terms of strengthening VR services, including services to transition-age youth, cannot be objectively determined at this early stage in the implementation of the redesign process.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4: How effective has VR been in collaborating with other agencies in achieving its transition results? What are the outcomes from VR's collaboration with secondary and postsecondary programs?

Results clearly indicate that VR is an active partner with special education and postsecondary educational institutions in the delivery of services to transition-age youth. RSA is involved in a number of collaborative efforts with other federal agencies. However, both the quantitative and qualitative data reviewed indicated that lack of personnel, service unit credit policies, and dedicated transition units in local rehabilitation agencies limit the impact and effectiveness of VR collaboration with other agencies involved in service delivery.

RESEARCH QUESTION 5: How effective has the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and RSA leadership been in the implementation of the law over the past 30 years, particularly with respect to transition from school to work and collaboration with the postsecondary educational system?

OSERS and RSA have consistently attempted to promote improved transition outcomes for adolescents and young adults with disabilities. Recent efforts have focused on the identification and dissemination of new or innovative practices being used in individual states. However, the lack of rigorous research and evaluation approaches significantly limits the ability of VR agencies to identify programs and practices that may be associated with superior employment outcomes. Despite a long history of leadership in this area, these agencies have conducted very few rigorous efficacy studies to determine the effect of specific service delivery practices on the transition population.

Recommendations

The 11 recommendations that emanate from the study are directed to the U.S. Congress and to the Rehabilitation Services Administration, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), and the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) within the U.S. Department of Education. Seven recommendations address changes to current service delivery practices that are designed to improve transition outcomes for youth with disabilities. These recommendations are derived directly from data collected through the series of structured interviews and review of promising practices and are consistent with the quantitative data reported above. In addition, four recommendations are offered to guide future research in a way that will lead to sound data that can be used to assess the success of further services, validate evidence-based practices, and create new service delivery approaches.

Recommendations for the U.S. Congress

1. Congress should change existing VR transition legislation and policy to require that VR services be made available to eligible youth no later than three years before an adolescent or young adult exits from secondary education.
2. Congress should authorize and allocate sufficient funds to support the development of a multifunctional transition unit in each state VR agency.
3. Congress should authorize and mandate the development and implementation of coordinated service delivery approaches, specifically targeted to transitioning youth with disabilities, that are based on the “blending” of funds from VR, special education, postsecondary education, Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), Veterans Administration, Social Security Administration, and other appropriate funding agencies.
4. Congress should mandate that RSA, NIDRR, and state VR agencies conduct rigorous evaluation studies that identify the transition program components that directly correlate with improved employment and postsecondary educational outcomes for transition-age youth.
5. Congress should mandate and allocate funds to support the implementation of rigorous evaluation studies designed to establish the efficacy of fully developed transition programs, practices, and policies.

Recommendations for the U.S. Department of Education: RSA, NIDRR, OSEP, and State VR Agencies

6. RSA, NIDRR, and state VR agencies should develop, implement, and evaluate new service unit policies under which the services provided by VR counselors outside the individualized plan for employment (IPE), such as time spent in collaboration with other agencies, secondary and postsecondary schools, families, etc., are recognized as service units comparable to IPE services.

7. RSA, NIDRR, and state VR agencies should design, implement, and evaluate a tiered structure for services delivered by VR counselors working with transition-age youth.
8. RSA and state VR agencies should allocate additional staff development resources for the preparation of current and future rehabilitation counselors to meet the needs of transition-age youth, and target recruitment and professional development activities to attract qualified people with disabilities to the field.
9. RSA should coordinate its secondary transition efforts with those of other federal and state agencies implementing dropout prevention programs.
10. RSA, NIDRR, OSEP, and state VR agencies should collaborate to conduct a comprehensive review of existing VR transition programs, practices, and policies being implemented in each individual state.
11. RSA, NIDRR, OSEP, and state VR agencies should conduct a systematic program of future research to identify the characteristics and service needs of transition-age youth with disabilities currently unserved or underserved by VR.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, together with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, set in motion policy changes that have allowed many thousands of children and youth with disabilities in the United States the opportunity to gain the educational and vocational skills needed to transition to living, working, and participating as adults in community life. The debate continues as to whether these laws have gone far enough in making the changes needed to enable youth with disabilities to leave high school, attain postsecondary education and training, and achieve employment rates and levels of wages comparable to their peers without disabilities.

Collaboration among vocational rehabilitation (VR), educational, and other public service systems has long been recognized as essential for effective transition planning and positive student outcomes (Benz, Lindstrom, & Latta, 1999). As Gould and Bellamy (1985) wrote many years ago, prior to the transition mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 (P.L. 101-476),

At the very least, transition must be dealt with as a problem of organizing community services and opportunities, and as a problem of structuring government policies to encourage needed responses from community services, employers, families, and persons with disabilities. (p. ix)

In providing services to transition-age youth with disabilities who are still in secondary education, VR agencies collaborate with state education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs), and institutions of higher education (IHEs). The collaboration that occurs is based on meeting statutory requirements governing the VR services program, the methods of ensuring services and transition services requirements in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the implementation of specific agency operations or initiatives (H. Berry, personal communication, February 5, 2008).

Mandates for Transition in the Rehabilitation Act

Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), most recently reauthorized under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), provides for individual states to receive federal grants to operate a comprehensive VR program designed to assess, plan, develop, and provide VR services to eligible individuals with disabilities to prepare for, and engage in, gainful employment. Appendix A compares the table of contents of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 with that of the reauthorized act within Title IV of WIA.

Examples in the Rehabilitation Act of the required collaboration between VR and other entities involved in the transition process were summarized and provided by OSERS for the study. Sections of the Rehabilitation Act addressing collaboration include, but are not limited to:

- Section 101(a)(11)(D) of the Rehabilitation Act requires the state VR agency to coordinate with educational officials and to enter into a formal interagency agreement with the state education agency with regard to transition planning and the delivery of transition services. The primary purpose of the formal interagency agreement is to ensure that students with disabilities who are eligible for VR services do not experience an interruption in services after they leave secondary school settings.
- Section 102(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act requires the VR program to use information submitted by education officials to assist in making eligibility determinations for VR services for students with disabilities. Education officials may provide critical information describing the students' vocational, employment, academic, and personal achievements that may contribute to the development of the student's individualized plan for employment (IPE).
- Regulations at 34 CFR 361.22 require that each student determined to be eligible for VR services or, if the designated state VR agency is operating under an order of selection, for each eligible student able to be served under the order, an IPE is to be developed and approved before the student leaves the secondary school

setting. It is important to note that VR agencies must collaborate with state education agencies in providing transition services to all students with disabilities and are required to conduct outreach and identify those students with disabilities who may need transition services (Section 101[a][11][D][iv] of the Rehabilitation Act). This includes students receiving special education and related services under the IDEA and students with disabilities covered only by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504).

- In regards to institutions of higher education (IHEs), the state plan for VR services must include an assurance that the governor will ensure that “an interagency agreement or other mechanism for interagency coordination takes effect “between the VR agency and public IHEs. Section 101(a)(8)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act and 34 CFR 361.53(d)(3) of its implementing regulations outline specific elements that must be addressed in this interagency agreement, including financial responsibility, terms for reimbursement of the VR agency for services under the agreement, procedures for resolving disputes, and information regarding procedures for identifying the responsibilities of the IHE and the VR agency for coordination and timely delivery of VR services. (H. Berry, personal communication, February 5, 2008)

To fulfill these mandates, the federal/state VR program provides direct services to tens of thousands of transition-age youth. In addition, the program collaborates with multiple federal and state partners to implement comprehensive transition programs that reach many other individuals served through special education, workforce development, mental health, developmental disability, and other service delivery systems. This study aims to synthesize both quantitative and qualitative data on the impact that the Rehabilitation Act has had on youth transition outcomes. It also includes an examination of the partnerships that VR maintains with secondary and postsecondary education, workforce investment, and Social Security disability systems.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the Rehabilitation Act on the employment and postsecondary education outcomes of eligible transition-age youth. Transition-age range varies among federal, state, and local agencies, but for the purpose of this study, the transition experiences of youth between the ages of 16 to 24 years are included. Transition data is reported by various national entities on youth as young as 14 years and as old as 25 years. The age range chosen for this study uses the current Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) required age for transition planning (i.e., age 16) as the lower limit, and the upper limit of age 24 to allow for the reporting of employment outcomes of those youth who are involved in postsecondary education or training. This study examines the extent to which VR's existing federal/state structure promotes the delivery of effective transition services to adolescents and young adults with disabilities, the long-term results of VR's investment in postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities, and the effectiveness of collaborative efforts among vocational rehabilitation, secondary and postsecondary education, and other service systems in the planning and delivery of transition services.

CHAPTER 2: Research Questions and Methodology

Vocational rehabilitation agencies can be effective partners in the transition from school to work or postsecondary education for students with disabilities. VR-funded services and supports can be pivotal in the success that those students achieve. However, the delivery of VR transition services differs significantly across states. There is a need to formally examine the extent to which transition-age students participate in VR services, the outcomes they achieve, and exemplary practices for student involvement with VR.

Research Questions

The specific research questions that are being addressed by this study are as follows:

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: How effective has VR been in transitioning students from school to work and/or from school to higher education? Specifically, what short-term and long-term results are achieved through the delivery of vocational rehabilitation services, particularly with respect to students transitioning from school to work and school to postsecondary education?

- To what extent do transition-age youth (16–24) participate in the federal/state VR program?
- What are the type and amount of services provided to transition-age youth by the federal/state VR program? How do these services vary across state programs?
- To what extent do transition-age youth who have received services through the federal/state VR program enter and succeed in employment? Are these individuals able to maintain employment and advance in their careers over time?

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: How have particular VR services correlated with successful employment outcomes, and how do existing definitions of successful case outcomes influence the range and content of transition services provided in

the field? What are the payoffs from VR’s substantial investments in postsecondary training of consumers with disabilities?

- To what extent do transition-age youth who have participated in postsecondary education with assistance from the federal/state vocational rehabilitation system subsequently enter and succeed in employment settings? Are they able to obtain employment in their chosen career fields?
- What are the “earnings impacts” of VR-funded postsecondary education services for transition-age youth in comparison to transition-age youth who do not receive VR services?

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: To what extent has the Department of Education’s Monitoring Redesign Initiative promoted the transition of students from school to employment and school to postsecondary education within the vocational rehabilitation system?

- What are the specific activities of the Department of Education’s Monitoring Redesign Initiative related to the transition of students from school to employment and school to postsecondary education within the vocational rehabilitation system? How do these activities differ from prior monitoring activities by the Department?
- To what extent have changes initiated through the Monitoring Redesign Initiative affected the participation of transition-age youth in the federal/state VR program, the types of services provided to these individuals, and the outcomes (employment and participation in postsecondary education) achieved by these individuals?

RESEARCH QUESTION 4: How effective has VR been in collaborating with other agencies in achieving its transition results? What are the outcomes from VR’s collaboration with secondary and postsecondary programs?

- To what extent does the federal/state VR system collaborate with secondary and postsecondary education institutions in the design and delivery of services for transition-age youth with disabilities? What is the nature of these collaborations?
- To what extent does the federal/state VR system collaborate with other federal and state programs in the design and delivery of services to transition-age youth? How effective are these partnerships?
- To what extent do VR collaborations with secondary and postsecondary education programs result in improved completion (graduation) rates and enhanced employment outcomes (employment rate, earnings, employment in one's chosen field)?

RESEARCH QUESTION 5: How effective has the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and RSA leadership been in the implementation of the law over the past 30 years, particularly with respect to transition from school to work and collaboration with the postsecondary educational system?

- What actions have the OSERS and RSA leadership taken over the past 30 years to implement the aspects of the Rehabilitation Act that pertain to transition-age students moving from school to work and collaboration with the postsecondary educational system?
- What, if any, specific actions could be taken by the OSERS and RSA leadership that would enhance the participation rates and program outcomes of transition-age youth with disabilities served through the federal/state VR program?

Methodology Used for the Study

The research design employed for the study to answer the research questions examined the role and effectiveness of VR involvement in transition from multiple perspectives and multiple data sources. The study design contained four components:

First, a comprehensive review of existing national data sets was conducted to examine the extent to which participation in the vocational rehabilitation program has affected the employment and educational outcomes of transition-age youth with disabilities. The data sources included the RSA 911 data system, the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), and the National Post-School Outcomes (NPSO) data systems. In researching the existing data, a comprehensive literature review was completed to obtain background information regarding issues of VR's involvement in the transition process and to search for evidence of best practices.

Second, telephone and face-to-face interviews with key stakeholders were completed to gather additional data on the effect of VR transition services. The key stakeholders who provided information included federal ED and DOL officials, state and local VR transition specialists, local education transition specialists, former consumers of VR transition services, current transition-age youth who may or may not receive VR services, and parents.

Third, the results of the data-collection activities were presented at an expert panel meeting on April 23, 2008, of federal and state VR and ED representatives, DOL representatives, representatives from national disability organizations, nationally renowned researchers in the field of transition, parent advocates, and transition-age youth in Arlington, Virginia. The purpose of the meeting was to receive feedback on and validate the preliminary findings and to generate recommendations for policymakers to improve transitional services in general and the involvement of VR and other adult service agencies in the transition process. The list of expert panel members is included as Appendix C.

Fourth, preliminary drafts of the study report were developed for review by the NCD Employment Committee and staff and submitted on January 31, 2008, and April 2, 2008. Based on feedback and guidance provided, a final draft report was submitted on June 2, 2008. This draft of the report was again reviewed by the Employment Committee and NCD staff as well as representatives from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), RSA, and OSEP. The final report, developed according to NCD specifications, was submitted on July 3, 2008.

CHAPTER 3: Overview of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Transition Process

This section provides background information on current definitions of transition, the statutes that guide current transition services for youth with disabilities, the role of vocational rehabilitation in the transition process, and the characteristics and labor market participation of transition-age youth with disabilities.

What Is Transition?

Beginning in 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) required transition services for all children with disabilities. Secondary education transition is defined in the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA as:

...designed within an outcome oriented process, that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education; vocational education; integrated employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult education; adult services; independent living or community participation (P.L. 108-446, §300.29).

Transition services identified for children with disabilities are specified in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and must contain transition goals and activities no later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child is 16 and must be updated annually. Special education and related services are intended to prepare students for employment and independent living, which makes it clear that educators, parents, and students must consider adult outcomes as they plan for students' school experiences (Wehman, 2006).

In broad terms, transition is a “formal process of cooperative planning that will assist students with disabilities to move from school into the adult world” (O’Leary, 2007). Three primary areas in this planning process are the development of (1) appropriate measurable postsecondary goals; (2) a course of study; and (3) a coordinated set of activities. Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals are based on age-appropriate transition assessments and are related to training, education,

employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills. This information is used to develop measurable postsecondary goals. These goals succinctly describe what students would like to achieve once they exit high school, and are based on students' strengths, preferences, and interests. The course of study involves all courses and educational experiences for students that will prepare students for the transition from school to the community. The IEP team members develop an educational program that directly relates to the postsecondary goals developed for a student.

The development of a coordinated set of activities is designed to provide a long-range educational plan with specific strategies to assist students to move from school into the community. A coordinated set of activities is based on students' strengths, preferences, and interests and can include the following based on students' needs: instruction, related services, community experiences, employment, postsecondary adult living, daily living, and functional vocational evaluation.

Another component in the transition of students from secondary education is the Summary of Performance. The Summary of Performance is for students who terminate their eligibility for special education as a result of graduation with a regular diploma or exceed the age of eligibility. Although the summary is not part of the IEP, it serves to document for students their academic achievement and functional performance while in secondary education. The document also includes recommendations to assist students in meeting their postsecondary goals. The intent of the Summary of Performance is to provide students with information that can assist them as they enter employment settings or postsecondary education programs.

Current Statutes that Guide Transition Services

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 Reauthorized Under Workforce Investment Act of 1998

The Rehabilitation Act was most recently reauthorized under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. With the stated purpose of consolidating, coordinating, and improving employment, training, literacy, and vocational rehabilitation, the Rehabilitation Act

creates the framework for a nationwide service system intended to support the transition from school to work (Bader, 2003). The Rehabilitation Act addresses the vocational and rehabilitation agencies and programs through which individuals with disabilities may receive a variety of employment support and training opportunities that will assist them with reaching a desired employment outcome (National Council on Disability [NCD], 2000). The act mandates that VR participate in transition planning under IDEA, at the very least, in the form of consultation and technical assistance. Although Title I of the Rehabilitation Act specifically identifies state rehabilitation agency responsibility for the provision of vocational rehabilitation services, it provides no statutory age requirement for rehabilitation services in the 1998 reauthorization.

Other Sections of WIA Directed Toward Youth Services

When WIA was enacted in 1998, individuals with disabilities, including youth, were not earmarked as a special population in the language of the legislation, but it was clearly the intent of Congress that individuals with disabilities would be served in the workforce development system (Bader, 2003). Although there were no special programs for people with disabilities required within the statute, there was the expectation that states and local workforce investment systems would include plans for serving people with disabilities in their One-Stop Career Center systems (Holcomb & Barnow, 2004). Also, VR was designated as a mandated partner agency, indicating legislative intent to serve individuals with disabilities (Bader, 2003).

It was the intent within WIA to create a comprehensive youth development system at the local level by consolidating funding streams that were used for job training and development for disadvantaged youth ages 14–21 into a single system (Resources for Welfare Decisions, 2002). Localities were given the challenge of bringing together an array of public and community-based organizations and programs, as well as employers, to leverage additional funding streams for serving youth to prepare them for entering the workforce. Not only were youth eligible for specially identified Youth Service Programs, but older youth, ages 18–21, are able to be co-enrolled as both

youth and adults in the One-Stop Career Center system. The specific titles and sections of WIA that are applicable to youth transition services are listed in Appendix B.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Prior to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, now the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), more than half of students with disabilities were not receiving appropriate educational services, and approximately 1 million were excluded from public school entirely (Committee on Education and the Workforce, 1997). The quality of special education and related services has improved since the passage of IDEA's predecessor statute more than 30 years ago, and IDEA's 1990 reauthorization articulated new transition requirements. IDEA 1997 reduced the age that transition planning must begin from 16 to 14. IDEIA 2004 increased the age back to the pre-1997 age requirement of 16. Previous requirements regarding the age at which transition planning should begin were not always clear in their interpretation. IDEIA established one clear age requirement for the mandatory start of transition planning and provided greater direction and clarification of what IEP transition teams must consider and what transition plans must contain (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2007). School IEP teams must now include transition planning in the first IEP that will be in effect when the child turns 16 years of age. Although many transition experts and advocates consider age 16 to be too late to begin the transition process, IDEIA makes it clear that IEP teams are free to begin transition planning at an earlier age if the team determines it appropriate to do so (Cortiella, 2008).

It is in the school setting that vocational rehabilitation can first become involved in youth transition planning: "The successful transition of students with disabilities from school to adult life is a shared responsibility...both [Acts] mandate and promote a shared vision" (Institute on Rehabilitative Issues, 2002, p. 4). Both the Rehabilitation Act and IDEIA require interagency collaboration and outline partner agency responsibility. The Rehabilitation Act further requires a formal interagency agreement with the public school systems outlining the roles and responsibilities for the state education agency and the VR program in assisting transitioning youth.

IDEA intended transition services to facilitate movement from school to post-school activities prior to the student's leaving the school environment (Price-Ellingstad & Berry, 1999). Post-school activities could include vocational training, postsecondary education, or work. Vocational rehabilitation evaluations become part of the eligibility records to which parents have a right (*Barnett v. Memphis City Schools*, 2004).

The current authorization of the law, IDEIA 2004, defines transition as a results-oriented process that focuses on academic achievement as well as functional activities, tightens the eligibility process, and includes the requirement for measurable postsecondary goals that are to encompass training, education, employment, and independent living skills. IDEIA 2004 also requires that the transition IEP specifies the services needed to assist the child in reaching his or her transition goals (Wehman, 2006). Whether or not referral for VR services is included in the IEP often depends on whether the individual or parent requests this service to be included, according to all the key stakeholder parents in the study.

Role of Vocational Rehabilitation in the Transition Process

The Vocational Rehabilitation Act amendments signed into law in 1954 expanded and improved vocational and rehabilitation programs for individuals with disabilities beyond those granted under the LaFollette Act of 1943 and previous legislation that focused on veterans and individuals with disabling conditions resulting from military service (Bader, 2003). Yet, it was not until the Vocational Rehabilitation Act's 1967 and 1968 amendments that funds were designated specifically for youth with disabilities (Stodden & Roberts, 2008). The 1967 and 1968 amendments included authorization to states for the set-aside of up to 10 percent of funds that they received for vocation and rehabilitation programs for youth. Not many states took advantage of this funding opportunity and, therefore, there was no evidence of improvement in post-school outcomes tied to this funding appropriation (Stodden & Roberts, 2008).

The decade of the 1970s saw a number of pieces of federal legislation that, even today, impact the availability and delivery of transition services for youth with disabilities. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, together with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142), set in motion policy changes providing children and youth with disabilities the opportunity to gain the requisite educational and vocational skills for transition to living, working, and participating as adults in community life. Whether these laws provide sufficient opportunity and support for youth with disabilities to exit secondary school, obtain postsecondary education or vocational training, and achieve employment levels and wages comparable to their peers without disabilities continues to be properly questioned.

The Rehabilitation Act and IDEIA allow for state agencies to establish parameters to guide the participation of vocational rehabilitation counselors in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) transition planning process. The result is wide variation from state to state in programs, practice, and outcomes requiring complex data collection, examination, and reporting (NCD, 2004b). Despite government efforts to address transition through more effective cooperation between educational, rehabilitation, and other adult service systems, smooth transition from secondary school to post-school pursuits for youth with disabilities has remained elusive in many cases (NCD, 2004b).

Eligibility Criteria for VR Services

The SEA and VR commonly agree that VR is invited by school personnel or parents to a transitioning youth's IEP meetings. VR does not independently track youth through school. Once notified of a transitioning individual, VR determines whether that person meets eligibility criteria. The individual must be someone with (a) a physical or mental disability that constitutes or results in substantial impediment to employment; (b) can benefit in terms of an employment outcome from vocational rehabilitation services; and (c) requires vocational rehabilitation services to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment. Eligibility for services must be determined within 60 days. However, even

transitioning youth who meet the eligibility criteria may not receive services due to an “order of selection.”

For eligible transitioning youth, a VR counselor is responsible for coordinating all VR services. The International Rehabilitation Counseling Consortium (IRCC) defines a rehabilitation counselor as “a counselor who possesses the specialized knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to collaborate in a professional relationship with people who have disabilities to achieve their personal, social, psychological and vocational goals” (Virginia Commonwealth University Department of Rehabilitation Counseling, n.d., quoting IRCC). The counselor’s role is to attend IEP transition planning meetings, coordinate interagency relationships, and serve as a transition resource (deFur, 2005).

Vocational Assessment

Vocational assessment and evaluation and community assessment are invaluable to the transition process. A proper assessment helps guide transitioning youth toward their future career path (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.). The vocational assessment should be coupled with community assessment. Whereas vocational assessment attempts to match skill with preference, community-based assessment examines work values and reinforcements, which may be more important. Proper vocational assessment will reveal employment preferences, training options, and expeditious job access at a reasonable salary level (Fraser, Vandergoot, Thomas, & Wagner, 2004).

Individualized Plan for Employment

The individualized plan for employment (IPE) is perhaps the most important document in the VR process. It is the cornerstone of the transition process. The VR counselor works with eligible youth and the IEP team to develop an IPE. The state plans required by the Rehabilitation Act must provide for the development and implementation of an IPE for eligible individuals (34 CFR 361.45). An IPE is required to contain, among other things, “a description of the specific employment outcome that is chosen by the eligible individual, consistent with [his or her] unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice” (29 USC 722[b][3][A]).

Any services provided by VR listed and described in the IPE must be focused toward securing a reasonable employment outcome. Beveridge and Fabian (2007) explain that Section 600 of the Rehabilitation Services Administration's VR Policies and Procedures mandates that the IPE shall be:

Developed and implemented in a manner that affords eligible individuals the opportunity to exercise informed choice in selecting an employment outcome, the specific vocational rehabilitation services to be provided under the IPE, the entity that will provide the vocational rehabilitation services, and the methods used to procure the services.

The decision as to how to implement the goal is a highly individualized decision that must be made on a case-by-case basis (*Stevenson v. Com. Dept. of Labor and Industry*, 1994). Whether an employment outcome is "consistent" with the consumer's listed attributes is subject to VR approval (29 USC 722[b][2][C][ii]). A plan that is unrealistic given the market or the individual's characteristics may not be approved (*Reaves v. Missouri Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Educ.*, 2005).

VR provides a coordinated set of activities designed within an outcome-oriented process that promotes movement from school to post-school activities. The coordinated set of activities must be based on the individual's needs, taking preferences and interests into account, and must include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and a functional vocational evaluation (WIA, 1998). The Rehabilitation Act identifies categories of services for individuals that can be provided through the IPE and that are shown in Table 1, including needs assessment, counseling and guidance, referral, job-related services, corrective surgery, or therapeutic treatment that may reduce or eliminate an employment impediment, prosthetics, employment-related transportation, related personal service, interpreter services, and rehabilitation technology.

Services may be provided to eligible transitioning youth directly by state VR agencies, or by other vendors arranged through VR. Other vendors include Community

Rehabilitation Programs, One Stop Career Centers, and other public and private sources. The *RSA Reporting Manual for the Case Service Report* (RSA 911) (2004) categorizes and defines 18 major service areas. These categories and paraphrased definitions are listed in **Table 1**.

TABLE 1
**VR Services Received by Transition-Age Youth
as Documented on an IPE**

Service	Paraphrased definition	Percentage of transition-age youth, ages 16–25 at time of application, who received service in FY 2006
Assessment	Determining an individual's eligibility for VR services, his/her priority under order of selection, and the nature and scope of VR services to be included in the IPE	22.20%
Diagnosis and Treatment of Impairments	A range of diagnostic and treatment services for physical and psychiatric/psychological impairments	9.60%
Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling and Guidance	Any form of counseling necessary for an individual to achieve an employment outcome, though more specific than the general relationship that exists between counselor and individual during the entire rehabilitation process	22.53%
College or University Training	Full- or part-time postsecondary training toward a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential	7.30%
Occupational/ Vocational Training	Nondegree or noncertification training to prepare for gainful employment in a recognized occupation	4.85%
On-the-Job Training	Training in specific job skills by a prospective employer, generally paid and generally toward the individual remaining in the same or similar position	1.47%
Basic Academic Remedial or Literacy Training	Remediation of basic academic skills necessary for competitive employment	0.92%
Job Readiness Training	Training toward appropriate work behaviors and appearance	5.64%

continued

continued

Service	Paraphrased definition	Percentage of transition-age youth, ages 16–25 at time of application, who received service in FY 2006
Disability-Related Augmentative Skills Training	Such training as orientation and mobility, sign language, and Braille	0.90%
Miscellaneous Training	Any other type of training, including GED or similar training	4.95%
Job-Related Services	Job search assistance: support and assistance in searching for and securing an appropriate job	9.65%
	Job placement assistance: referral to a specific job resulting in an interview	11.38%
	On-the-job support services: support services provided to an individual who has been placed in employment to stabilize the placement and enhance job retention	6.79%
Transportation Services	Training in the use of public transportation and/or travel and related expenses necessary to participate in a VR service	9.11%
Maintenance	Monetary support for expenses that exceed the normal expenses of the individual and that are necessary for eligibility determination and services under an IPE	5.14%
Rehabilitation Technology	The systematic application of technologies, engineering methodologies, or scientific principles to meet the needs of, and address the barriers confronted by, individuals with disabilities, including rehabilitation engineering service, assistive technology devices, assistive technology services	1.58%
Personal Assistance Service	Wide range of services provided by one or more people designed to assist with activities of daily living and to increase the individual's independence: reader services, interpreter services, and personal attendant services	
	Reader services	0.13%
	Interpreter services	0.43%
	Personal attendant services	0.14%

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Service	Paraphrased definition	Percentage of transition-age youth, ages 16–25 at time of application, who received service in FY 2006
Technical Assistance Services	Technical assistance and other consultative services to assist in the pursuit of self-employment, telecommuting, and small business operation outcomes	0.70%
Other Services	Services that cannot be recorded elsewhere	8.89%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration, 2004.

From these RSA 911 services, a 2003 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report created four major service categories: employment, training, education, and support. The GAO (2003) study found that using those four categories, the following selected services identified in **Table 2** were provided to youth through VR.

TABLE 2
**Selected Services Provided to Youth through the
VR Program in FY 2001**

Type of Service	Percentage of Youth Ages 14–21 Served
Employment Services	
Job finding services	36%
Job placement services	29%
Training Services	
Business/vocational training	12%
On-the-job training	8%
Educational Services	
Postsecondary educational training	21%
Educational training below postsecondary level	19%
Support Services	
Counseling and guidance	74%
Transportation services	23%

Source: Government Accountability Office, 2003.

GAO and RSA 911 data reveal similar use trends for most-used to least-used services; however, there is great variation in the percentage of use. It is notable that the ages of youth included in the data collection vary, with GAO collecting data between ages 14 to 21 and RSA collecting data between ages 16 to 25.

From these services, The Study Group (2007) identified two categorical areas: transition to postsecondary education and transition to vocational training. Within these categories, The Study Group identified the most frequently used policies and practices of VR agencies, and the accompanying services. Among those are:

- Transition to postsecondary education: career counseling and guidance services to eligible youth of high school age, providing supports related to transportation, tuition, books, dormitory costs, assistive technology, personal counseling, professional tutoring, job coaching, job development, resource connection
- Vocational training: career counseling and guidance services to eligible youth of high school age, providing supports related to transportation, tuition, dormitory costs, assistive technology, personal counseling, professional tutoring, job coaching, job development, resource connection

The Study Group (2007) further identified the following as the most effective transition policies and practices:

- IEP and IPE coordination prior to high school exit
- Career counseling and guidance services to eligible youth while still in high school
- VR agency personnel rapport with and personal encouragement to youth in their transition efforts

This last practice, along with career exploration and collaboration with educators in the development of the transition IEP, are not services usually listed on the IPE, and therefore are unable to be represented in the current RSA 911 data system.

Services Provided Outside the IPE

Not all transition-related services provided by VR counselors are identified within the IPE. Attendance at IEP meetings, career exploration with students before or after age 16, meetings with family members to explain VR services, and consultation with teachers and other IEP team members are all examples of activities that counselors can be called upon to provide, but are not captured in the data maintained by VR agencies. These services provided by VR counselors can be considered to be components of their counseling, guidance, and support role with consumers and are a part of transition services. Specific activities, such as meetings with IEP team members, are not listed as standalone services in the Rehabilitation Act, as amended, are not generally listed in the IPE, and are not included in the RSA 911 data-collection system. Yet these are the very activities that are most often provided to transition-age youth who are seeking VR services and the ones most often requested by school personnel and parents of transitioning youth, according to the key stakeholders of this study.

Characteristics and Goals of Transition-Age Youth Receiving VR Services

The RSA 911 data reveals that from FY 2002 to FY 2006, 59 percent of VR consumers ages 16 to 25 were male, and 41 percent were female. In 2006, representation of females among this sample varied from 34.0 percent (South Carolina) to 60.0 percent (Illinois). During this same period, the service population of VR consumers ages 16 to 25 was 73.1 percent white and 26.9 percent minority members. In 2006, minority representation averaged 24.4 percent and varied greatly, from 93.1 percent (D.C.) to less than 2 percent (Maine). Among the 50 states, Hawaii had the highest rate of minority participation at 73.4 percent (Institute for Community Inclusion, n.d.).

VR service population by disability category is shown in **Table 3**. From FY 2002 to FY 2006, individuals with learning disabilities comprised the largest number of consumers, followed by individuals with intellectual disabilities and mental health impairments. There were large variations in the types of disabilities of participants served across states, particularly among the three largest service populations

nationwide. Among consumers with learning disabilities, for example, proportions ranged from 16.5 percent (Florida) to 57.0 percent (Delaware). Participation by consumers with intellectual disabilities ranged from under 10 percent (D.C., North Dakota, South Carolina, Arkansas) to over 30 percent (Indiana, North Carolina, Georgia). Consumers with mental health impairments varied from under 10 percent (Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia) to over 30 percent (Vermont, Florida, Utah).

TABLE 3
VR Consumers by Disability, FY 2002–2006

Learning disabilities	31.9%
Intellectual disabilities*	18.4%
Mental health impairments	18.3%
Orthopedic impairments	9.1%
Hearing impairments	3.8%
Substance abuse	3.8%
Visual impairments	2.4%
Traumatic brain injury	1.7%
Other	10.5%

*Data was collected under category using term *mental retardation*.
Source: Institute for Community Inclusion, n.d.

Dependence on Financial Assistance

Upon exiting VR, transition-age youth receive slightly more financial assistance than when they entered (see **Table 4**). This may be explained by increased use of Social Security work incentives by Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), and SSI-Blind recipients at time of entry into the workforce as well as use of other work-related benefits such as subsidized housing and transportation.

TABLE 4

Receipt of Financial Assistance by Transitional Youth

Funding Source	VR Entry	VR Exit
SSI-Blind	2.2%	2.5%
SSI-Disabled	61.0%	65.2%
SSDI	10.6%	13.4%
General assistance (welfare)	8.6%	10.4%
AFDC	6.5%	4.2%
Veterans disability	0%	0%
Other disability	2.7%	0.8%
Other public support	4.9%	5.4%
Family and friends	29.1%	17.3%
Workers compensation	1.4%	0.6%
Private relief agency	0%	0%
Private insurance	1.9%	0%
Public institution (tax-supported)	3.0%	1.1%
All other support (excluding wages)	3.0%	4.9%
TOTAL	27.8%	28.6%

Source: Research Triangle Institute, 2000.

Vocational and Postsecondary Education Goals of Transition-Age Youth

According to a study by the Research Triangle Institute (RTI, 2000), transition-age youth generally establish vocational goals in one of three occupational fields, as shown in **Table 5**. As this table shows, special education youth are less likely to establish IPE goals in professional/managerial/technical occupations than are VR consumers in general, and are more likely to establish goals in service occupations. Once established, only 18 percent of youth VR consumers changed their vocational goals following IPE development.

TABLE 5
Vocational Goals for Special Education Youth

Field	Overall	Special Education	
		Youth	Others
Professional/managerial/technical	40%	25%	63%
Services	24%	31%	13%
Clerical/sales	12%	13%	11%

Source: Research Triangle Institute, 2000.

The occupational aspirations of youth with disabilities are more closely associated with their perceived efficacy than with their actual high school academic achievement (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Marder, 2007, quoting Bandura et al., 2001). Higher expectations for academic and career success are related to high school completion rates (Wagner et al., 2007, quoting Franse & Siegel, 1987) and higher postsecondary school attendance rates (Wagner et al., 2007, quoting Durham, Danner, & Seyfrit, 1999).

Research suggests that transitioning youth make choices about their own participation and effort partly on how they perceive learning tasks, the learning environment, and other participants in their environment, including teachers and other students (Wagner, et al., 2007, quoting Hadwin et al., 2001). In their report on the NLTS2 data, Wagner, et al. (2007) reveal that positive views dominate the self-descriptions of youth with disabilities. These youth consider themselves to have a variety of strengths and enjoyable personality characteristics and are confident in their abilities. Further, they are optimistic about their futures. Though most youth with disabilities expect to graduate from high school with a regular diploma, they are less confident they will attend postsecondary school, especially when compared with their peers without disabilities (see **Table 6**).

TABLE 6
**Predictions of Youth Regarding Regular High School Diplomas
 and Postsecondary School**

Likelihood	Graduate from High School with a Regular Diploma	Attend Postsecondary School
Definitely will	84.8%	52.4%
Probably will	11.7%	34.0%
Probably or definitely won't	3.5%	13.6%

Source: Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Marder, 2007.

Mitigating the positive self-images is research revealing that youth with disabilities show a positive, but erroneous, bias in their self-assessment (Wagner et al., 2007). More discouraging, positive outlooks are largely held by populations that tend to be waiting for services because of order of selection. For example, youth with autism are less likely than others to report a strong sense of affiliation at school or be involved in school activities. They make friends less easily, and do not feel cared about by friends as often. All these beliefs are linked with a reduced likelihood of graduating from high school. Youth with intellectual disabilities are more likely to feel not at all useful. They rarely or never enjoy life and may feel more depressed (Wagner et al., 2007). Yet these individuals show up as having positive self-images in the NLTS2 data.

In 2003–2004, states reported more than 15.1 million students were enrolled in one or more secondary or postsecondary vocational and technical education courses. Of these, 1.15 million were individuals with disabilities (ED/OSEP, 2005). Approximately 25 percent believe they definitely will complete a vocational, technical, or trade school. Approximately 25 percent of youth with disabilities believe they definitely will graduate from a four-year college, and 34 percent believe they definitely will graduate from a two-year college. In reality, only 12 percent of individuals with disabilities graduate from college, as opposed to 23 percent of individuals without disabilities (Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer, & Acosta, 2005).

Labor Market Activity of Youth with Disabilities

In 2005, the national employment rate gap between people with disabilities and without disabilities was 37 percentage points (Institute for Community Inclusion, n.d.). Between 2000 and 2005, 4.2 percent of individuals 18–24 years old cite their disability as a reason for limited activity (CDC, 2006). Most youth with disabilities are certain they will get employment of some type following high school, but are less certain that these jobs will pay enough for them to be financially self-sufficient (Wagner et al., 2007). While 95 percent of youth with disabilities believe they will get a paid job, only 65 percent believe they definitely will be financially independent, and 72 percent believe they will live independently. Social Security trends support this fear. Between 1982 and 1994 there was an approximate 50 percent increase in the number of individuals working who were moving to Social Security benefits. Forty-three percent of those individuals were under the age of 30 (Fraser, Vandergoot, Thomas, & Wagner, 2004, quoting SSA, 1994).

CHAPTER 4: Known Obstacles to Successful Transition

Despite the increased knowledge and awareness of transition planning for students with disabilities, there remain several obstacles that impede the successful transition of these students from secondary education into the community. Although the obstacles described below are in separate categories, the interrelationship of these issues cannot be overlooked. The lack of student participation in the process is an obstacle that impacts on the understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all IEP team members. A lack of understanding of the extent of VR responsibility in the transition process impacts the transition team's understanding of the role of the VR counselor. Insufficient information of community resources contributes to the lack of linkages between schools and the community agencies whose services are needed to support successful transition from secondary school. Yet the importance of each of these obstacles to the successful transition of students with disabilities warrants a discussion on each one to highlight their significance. The obstacles identified below are not an exhaustive list, but reflect some of the key issues faced by transition teams.

Participation by Youth in the Transition Process

The public agencies (secondary schools) are required by IDEIA to invite students to their IEP meetings; however, students can decide whether or not they wish to attend. Reasons for their lack of participation vary. Students with disabilities often do not understand the IEP transition planning process and believe it has little, if any, impact on their lives. They often lack the self-determination skills or self advocacy skills needed to fully participate in the process. Cameto (2005) reported on data collected through the NLTS2 on student participation in the IEP meeting. Although 58 percent of the students reported providing some input, only 12 percent reported taking a leadership role. Without students actively participating in their transition IEP process, they may not learn about their potential access of VR services while they are still in school.

Determining Appropriate Career Goals

Transition planning can often become a separate activity in the development of an IEP, instead of becoming an integral part of the development and implementation of the IEP goals and objectives. As a result, the identification of educational assistance focuses on the immediate needs of students with limited consideration of the knowledge, skills, or behaviors needed in employment, postsecondary education, or other post-school environments (Stodden & Jones, 2002). Confusion on the part of IEP teams on the IDEIA requirement of determining appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based on age-appropriate transition assessments contributes to the issue of insufficient information for transition-related activities in the IEP. School personnel in particular are unsure what activities provide the information needed and how to incorporate the information into the IEP transition planning process.

Engaging VR Counselors in the Transition Process

In a study conducted in 2007 by The Study Group, one of the most commonly reported barriers to effective transition was that local education agencies (i.e., schools) did not effectively engage VR agency personnel in the planning and provision of transition services for transition-age youth. The difficulty of having VR pay for specific vocational services while eligible transition-age youth were attending high school (e.g., job coaches, assessment, establishing community-based work experiences, or providing transportation) was also reported by this study. Participating in the development of transition IEPs, establishing IPEs and providing career counseling and guidance were considered to be the most effective strategies utilized by VR counselors when working with transition-age youth who are still in high school (The Study Group, 2007).

Work-Related Experience

Students with disabilities often lack work-related experiences that are essential to an effective transition to adult living (Wehman & Kregel, 2004). Providing community-based work experiences for students while in high school enables students to explore different

work environments to determine their possible career goals. This information is critical for IEP team members to determine transition-related activities. Work-related community experiences are often excluded as part of students' transition planning due to the lack of understanding on how to create these experiences and the increased focus on core academic areas that limit these experiences as part of the students' high school experiences (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2005; Wehman, 2006).

Roles and Responsibilities of Transition IEP Participants

Transition planning is a collaborative effort involving students, family members, special education personnel, and community service providers. There is a lack of understanding of the roles and responsibilities that each member brings to this process. For students, as described previously, their lack of understanding involves their knowledge of transition, the impact of the planning on their future goals, and their role in this process. Family members lack information about available resources in the community, who should be invited to participate in the process, and their role in planning post-school goals and activities (Chambers, Hughes, & Carter, 2004; Wehman, 2006). School personnel lack an understanding on how transition is incorporated in the IEP, the process for notifying community agency personnel for meetings (i.e., prior written consent by a family member or student, if age of majority, must be obtained prior to inviting community agencies to the IEP meeting), and information on the skills, demands, and behaviors required in post-school settings. Adult agency service providers are unsure of their roles and responsibilities in the transition planning process, in particular during the early stages of the process. For example, rehabilitation counselors may believe their role in transition planning begins when the student is one or two years from exiting high school. However, activities such as information sharing or technical assistance can be provided to IEP team members as early as three to four years prior to exit (Lovelace, Somers, & Steveson, 2006).

Linkages with Community Resources and Services

It has been reported by key stakeholders that there is often a lack of information sharing among IEP team members, in particular between school and adult agency personnel. A thorough assessment of available community services and resources and their potential support for students with disabilities is often not communicated. This contributes to limited or nonexistent linkages between the school and community services. When there is some participation on the part of community services in the IEP meeting, often school personnel are not familiar with the requirements for receiving services from participating agencies. This lack of understanding on how to access community services is also true for family members and students. As a result, students and family members often do not follow up with referrals to these agencies once a student exits school and is in the community. For example, collaboration between schools and vocational rehabilitation agencies is not widespread and is limited to the basic referral of students to vocational rehabilitation (Benz, Lindstrom, & Latta, 1999). For youth with learning disabilities or emotional disabilities, and those living in rural areas, effective collaboration appears to be especially problematic (Cimera & Rusch, 2000).

Understanding the obstacles confronting IEP team members when developing and implementing IEP transition plans will expand as more is learned from the results of the data collection of State Performance Plan Indicators 13 and 14 as required under Part B of IDEIA. The IEP transition planning process is the focus of Indicator 13. This indicator requires states to provide the percentage of youth ages 16 and above with an IEP that includes coordinated, measurable, annual goals and transition services that will reasonably enable the student to meet the postsecondary goals. States have developed procedures for LEAs to review IEP transition plans and submit information to their state department of education.

Indicator 14 requires states to provide the percentage of youth who had IEPs, are no longer in secondary education, and who have been competitively employed, enrolled in some type of secondary school, or both, within one year of leaving school. States are required to conduct follow-up surveys with students (or family members) who have

graduated, dropped out, or are no longer eligible for special education services to assess their post-school outcomes.

Retention in Secondary Education: The Dropout Dilemma

Preventing youth from dropping out of secondary education settings prior to completion of their educational program is an enormous challenge for school systems as well as for VR and other partners in the transition process. The negative effects associated with dropping out of high school for students in general are well established and widely known in the educational community. Available data indicate that these negative effects are exacerbated when the dropout is a student with disabilities. However, these data are limited. It should be noted that, in the VR context, the term *dropout* typically refers to eligible youth who drop out of the VR system (data that are regularly reported), and not students who have dropped out of high school. A review of state data reveal that some state-level VR programs focus to some degree on serving students who have already dropped out of school (Alabama Department of Rehabilitative Services, 2000), while other state level programs do not address dropouts (Florida Department of Rehabilitative Services, 2007).

The Effects of Dropping Out of High School

The initial relief often experienced by a student with disabilities upon dropping out is quickly replaced by the realistic apprehension about his or her preparation for economic, academic, and social independence (Scanlon & Mellard, 2002). A student with disabilities is already disadvantaged in finding employment, equal pay, and equal hours. A high school dropout is less likely to be in the labor force, but more likely to be unhealthy and imprisoned (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2007). The NLTS2 found similar results specific to students with disabilities (see **Table 7**).

An important issue identified by a VR transition key stakeholder is the fact that there is no way to determine the extent to which resources and financial support provided to transition youth during postsecondary education actually result in positive employment outcomes. This key stakeholder further stated that rather than keep a VR

case open, it is often closed after graduation without knowing how well the individual has integrated into the workforce.

TABLE 7
**Results Associated with Dropping Out of School
for Students with Disabilities**

Result	High School Completer	Dropout
Engaged in school, work, or work prep	86%	69%
Enrolled in vocational or technical school	5%	8%
Enrolled in two- or four-year college	27%	1%
Supports an independent household and children	7%	27%
Parenting	3%	19%
Has a driver's license	73%	51%
Spent a night in jail	11%	33%
Hours worked per week	27	34

Source: NLTS2.

Reasons for Dropping Out

The NTLS found that students with disabilities were more likely to drop out of high school than their peers without disabilities. In between Wave 1 and Wave 2 of the NLTS, 28 percent of students interviewed dropped out of high school. Though some research and literature address dropout prevention, the needs of students with disabilities have not been addressed (Kemp, 2006). What little is written tends to be divided into two categories: academic failure and disengagement from the educational environment (Kemp, 2006).

NLTS2 Wave 1 parent surveys track four reasons for high school dropout: academic difficulty/poor grades (17.5 percent); disliked school experience (29.2 percent); illness or disability (2.8 percent); and other reason (62.9 percent) (ED Institute of Educational Sciences, 2004a). The first three reasons are, at best, vaguely related to VR services. The largest category of dropout reasons, “other,” is unexplored. These data do not appear to provide VR with guidance on dropout prevention policy and programs.

NLTS2 also reports on the reasons that youth are not currently in school, including dropout. Given that the prevailing reason (85.4 percent) was “on school vacation,” these data were likely collected during a standard vacation time and are not helpful in providing insight as to why students are not in school (ED Institute of Educational Sciences, 2004b).

Examination of the causes of dropout must also take into consideration the number of students who are removed from school through expulsion. A notable number of expulsions occur not because of the behavioral difficulties of students, but because of an effort by schools and districts to rid themselves of problem students, including students with disabilities (NCD, 2004b). With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, some schools have falsified dropout rates and otherwise pushed low-achieving students out of school to meet district expectations (Goldberg, 2004). For example, a dropout may be falsely classified as having moved or information on the student classified as “missing.” Although no data were found during the study, it would be important in the future to determine if there is a correlation between the dropout rate reduction over the past decade and the rate of expulsions during the same period.

Limited Capacity of VR Services to Meet the Demand

The Study Group (2007) surveyed 80 VR agencies regarding VR counselor caseloads, resulting in a 90 percent response rate. VR counselor caseloads ranged from 46 to 202, with a mean of 108 and a median of 105. Only 46 percent reported having counselors co-located with office space in local high schools (The Study Group, 2007, p. v). As part of a study assessing national transition policies and practices, an RSA survey of state VR agencies included questions regarding collaboration barriers and facilitators. Survey participants reported “that state and local interagency agreements overestimated the capacity of the VR agency to fully implement all of the procedures, processes, and services identified within these agreements, and that state and local interagency agreements were not specific enough concerning the roles and responsibilities of each agency” (H. Berry, personal communication, February 5, 2008).

Impact of the Order of Selection

Congress intended that the transition portions of the Rehabilitation Act “include transition services [to not only] those students in special education programs, but also to students with disabilities who are in regular education programs” (Virginia Commonwealth University, 1993 quoting Senate Report 102-357, p. 24). However, limited financial resources may prevent a state VR agency from providing extensive services to all eligible individuals. The Rehabilitation Act requires that if a state agency cannot provide vocational rehabilitation services to all eligible individuals who apply for services, a process, called Order of Selection, must be developed to establish the order in which eligible individuals with disabilities will be provided services (Section 101[a][5]). Order of Selection does not affect the eligibility determination process; eligibility determination follows all existing policies and guidelines. The Order of Selection does require that individuals with the most significant disabilities will be selected first for the provision of vocational rehabilitation services; and those eligible individuals who do not meet the order of selection criteria will have access to services provided through the agency’s information and referral system (34 CFR 361.36).

The requirements related to Order of Selection reflect a clear congressional intent to focus services on individuals with significant disabilities. However, the implementation of these requirements may make it highly unlikely that some groups of transition-age youth (e.g., individuals with milder learning disabilities, Asperger’s Syndrome, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) will actually receive services, despite that fact that they have been determined eligible for and could benefit from the array of VR services.

Insufficient Number of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors

From all anecdotal information reviewed during the course of this study, it is clear that there continue to be insufficient numbers of VR counselors who can actively participate in the transition planning process, let alone provide services to all VR-eligible youth, given current federal funding appropriation guidelines and amounts. There currently is no dedicated funding appropriation for youth transition services through VR. This has

impact, especially on the services provided by VR counselors that are documented on the IPE. These services are not viewed as a priority by many state and local VR agencies, according to VR key stakeholders who were interviewed for this study, and counselor time may not be allocated to provide these services. The exception to this, according to the key stakeholders, appears to be with the VR agencies that have dedicated VR counselors who serve the transition population as all or a set percentage of their consumer caseload.

CHAPTER 5: Findings of the Study

The results reported below are derived from multiple sources of data. First, a comprehensive literature review was conducted to identify and review prior studies that focused on the efficacy of VR services for adolescents and young adults with disabilities. Second, various existing databases were assessed, analyzed, and queried to obtain data related to transition outcomes that are directly or indirectly tied to use of VR services by youth with disabilities. Third, structured qualitative interviews were conducted with 24 key stakeholders: transition-age consumers of VR services (n=4), parents of transition-age youth (n=7), parents of young adults who used VR services during their transition from high school (n=2), state and local educators who are involved in transition (n=7), and state and local VR personnel (n=4). The interviews were conducted between October 18, 2007, and March 25, 2008. Interview protocols were reviewed in advance by the NCD Employment Committee and approved by a university Institutional Review Board. Also incorporated into the findings is information received from the study's expert panel members who submitted comments and data after the April 23, 2008, panel meeting.

The primary data sources used to address the first research question were the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS), the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), and the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) 911 data system. The NLTS and NLTS2 are the main data sources providing detailed information on the characteristics of students who are VR participants (Wittenburg & Maag, 2002). NLTS2 is tracking more than 11,000 special education students through secondary and transitional services to early adulthood. Preliminary findings are available as smaller special reports and data.

The RSA 911 data system is the second of two major data sources providing detailed information on the characteristics of VR participants (Wittenburg & Maag, 2002). Uniformly reported state VR data are collected and compiled into a single database. Data tables using the RSA 911 data have been constructed by the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI), which makes public viewing of the data available through

the StateData.info Web site. The reports that are available are based on annual case closures and include data elements such as consumer demographics, services delivered and costs, and closure outcomes. While the RSA 911 data system is an important evaluation tool, the system lacks a comprehensive set of data elements specifically designed for collecting information related to transitioning students (The Study Group, 2007).

Findings Responding to the Research Questions

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: How effective has VR been in transitioning students from school to work and/or from school to higher education? Specifically, what short-term and long-term results are achieved through the delivery of vocational rehabilitation services, particularly with respect to students transitioning from school to work and school to postsecondary education?

Extent to Which Special Education Students Are Served by VR

Despite the identified barriers to involvement, participation in VR by transition-age students appears to be increasing steadily. **Table 8** provides the number of VR consumers with case closures who are ages 16–22 for the years 1991–2005 and the percentage of all VR consumers that are represented by this group. It is unknown at what age cases opened or how many total cases were closed for any individual year listed. As this table shows, transition-age youth represented approximately 17 percent of all VR consumers in the early 1990s, but over one-fourth of all consumers in 2004 and 2005. The most dramatic increase occurred between the years 2003 and 2004, when participation by individuals of transition age increased over 50 percent. This may be due to the fact that beginning in 2002 and continuing in 2003, there was an increased emphasis on transition by RSA in its required monitoring efforts with all 80 state VR agencies. In addition RSA began joint monitoring efforts with OSEP during this same time period (H. Berry, personal communication, July 2, 2008) which may have resulted in more accurate reporting of data rather than a considerable increase between 2003 and 2004.

TABLE 8
**Number of Transition-Age Consumers of
Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies
at Year of Case Closure**

FY	All	16–22	%
1991	165,893	29,137	17.6%
1993	159,629	26,882	16.8%
1995	179,099	29,691	16.6%
1997	184,370	32,036	17.4%
1998	196,096	34,061	17.4%
1999	205,392	37,205	18.1%
2000	212,037	38,924	18.4%
2001	210,283	38,336	18.2%
2002	205,524	36,893	18.0%
2003	204,383	36,338	17.8%
2004	201,911	54,097	26.8%
2005	197,168	54,743	27.8%

Source: Institute for Community Inclusion, n.d.

Analyses of the NLTS2 data have shown that the state VR agency is not contacted by the local education agency for participation for the majority of special education students. In the Student's School Program Survey, Regular School, NLTS2 defines a contact to be "when a state VR agency is contacted by the school or school system regarding programs or employment for the student." The comparable survey for "special schools" does not contain this definition or a related question. Per NLTS2 data, the percentage of contacts made in transition planning for youth by state VR agencies averaged 37.8 percent for the 12 disability categories. Youth with speech impairments had the least frequent contacts at 28.6 percent; youth with visual impairments had the greatest number of contacts at 59.3 percent.

According to the NLTS2 data in 2002, a total of 37.8 percent of youth contacts were made by state VR agencies. The greatest percentage of contacts was made between the age categories of 16 and 17–18. By age 14, 8.3 percent of youth had been contacted, 16.3 percent by age 15, 35.8 percent by age 16, and 56.4 percent by ages 17–18. Similarly, the greatest percentage of contacts was made between the grade levels of 10 and 11 and between 11 and 12. At grade 7 and 8 levels, only 8.5 percent of

youth were contacted by a state VR agency. A total of 14.6 percent of youth were contacted by VR by grade 9, 32.5 percent by grade 10, and 57.5 percent by grades 11 and 12.

Numbers of Transition-Age Youth Potentially Eligible for VR Transition Services

The Study Group (2007) noted that the fall 2005 IDEIA child count identified 2,285,137 students with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 21, of which 317,062 were between 18 and 21 years of age. Unfortunately, there are no national data available on the number of transition-age youth receiving VR services while in school (The Study Group, 2007); only the contacts made by the local education agency to VR are known. Therefore, there is no way at this time for determining the potential number of transition-age youth who are potentially eligible and could benefit from VR services.

Employment Outcomes for Transition-Age Students Receiving VR Services

Data from the RSA 911 database reveal that 118,100 transition-age consumers exited the VR program in FY 2006 after receiving services. Of these, 68,024, or 58 percent, achieved employment outcomes (Institute for Community Inclusion, n.d.). For purposes of this study, the definition of an employment outcome is that contained in Section 7(11) of the Rehabilitation Act. An employment outcome means that an individual enters into full-time or part-time (if more appropriate) employment in the integrated labor market, has satisfied the vocational outcome of supported employment, or has any other vocational outcome that is determined appropriate by the Secretary of Education (e.g., self-employment, telecommuting, or business ownership). Data that are available across state agencies reveal the extent to which transition-age consumers participate in the VR program, the type of services provided, and employment outcomes at the time of exit from the VR system.

In 2000, a fourth interim report focusing on transition-age VR consumers and their long-term outcomes was completed by the Research Triangle Institute for RSA. The report found that nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of VR consumers who were transition-age youth achieved an employment outcome as a result of VR services; the

rate for youth who had received special education services in high school was slightly higher than that of VR consumers who had not received special education services (64 versus 59 percent). On the negative side, VR consumers who received special education earned less per hour (\$5.57 versus \$6.47) and worked fewer hours (33.6 versus 37.1) than did those transition-age VR consumers who had never been involved in special education (RTI, 2000).

Tables 9–12 compare key employment outcomes for transition-age VR consumers with all VR consumers served from 1991 through 2005. As these tables show, outcomes for youth compared favorably with those of all VR consumers. For example, mean work hours per week for youth was nearly equal to, and in some years greater than, the mean for all VR consumers. Hourly wages and weekly earnings for youth were lower than the overall means, but this would be logical given that they would likely have less work experience and many would be entering their first job.

TABLE 9

**Work Hours per Week of
Transition-Age VR
Consumers**

FY	All	16–22	%
1991	34.5	34.3	99.4%
1993	35.1	34.5	98.3%
1995	34.4	34.3	99.6%
1997	33.7	33.8	100.3%
1998	33.8	34.0	100.6%
1999	34.1	34.2	100.2%
2000	34.1	34.3	100.6%
2001	34.0	33.9	99.8%
2002	33.4	33.1	98.9%
2003	33.0	32.3	97.8%
2004	32.9	32.7	99.5%
2005	32.7	32.6	99.5%

TABLE 10

**Hourly Wages of
Transition-Age VR
Consumers**

FY	All	16–22	%
1991	\$6.59	\$5.26	79.8%
1993	\$6.71	\$5.38	80.2%
1995	\$7.04	\$5.65	80.3%
1997	\$7.66	\$6.21	81.1%
1998	\$8.06	\$6.58	81.6%
1999	\$8.29	\$6.84	82.5%
2000	\$8.68	\$7.16	82.5%
2001	\$9.13	\$7.48	81.9%
2002	\$9.61	\$7.64	79.5%
2003	\$9.77	\$7.71	79.0%
2004	\$9.97	\$8.68	87.1%
2005	\$10.24	\$8.89	86.8%

TABLE 11
Weekly Earnings of Transition-Age VR Consumers

FY	All	16–22	%
1991	\$ 227.76	\$ 180.78	79.4%
1993	\$ 235.47	\$ 185.62	78.8%
1995	\$ 242.45	\$ 193.74	79.9%
1997	\$ 258.09	\$ 209.98	81.4%
1998	\$ 272.34	\$ 223.75	82.2%
1999	\$ 283.07	\$ 234.05	82.7%
2000	\$ 295.82	\$ 245.73	83.1%
2001	\$ 310.15	\$ 253.42	81.7%
2002	\$ 321.26	\$ 252.73	78.7%
2003	\$ 322.20	\$ 248.72	77.2%
2004	\$ 327.50	\$ 283.84	86.7%
2005	\$ 335.31	\$ 289.82	86.4%

TABLE 12
Transition-Age VR Consumers Receiving Employer Health Insurance

FY	All	16–22	%
1991	4.3%	3.5%	81.9%
1993	37.5%	35.0%	93.2%
1995	39.0%	37.3%	95.5%
1997	44.8%	42.7%	95.2%
1998	45.8%	44.3%	96.9%
1999	45.3%	44.1%	97.2%
2000	45.7%	44.0%	96.3%
2001	47.4%	44.4%	93.7%
2002	28.7%	25.4%	88.5%
2003	30.9%	26.5%	85.6%
2004	29.7%	29.5%	99.2%
2005	30.0%	29.9%	99.8%

Source for Tables 9–12: Institute for Community Inclusion, n.d.

Findings from the Key Stakeholder Interviews: Availability and Effectiveness of VR Services for Transition-Age Youth

Although data reveal that an increasing number of transition-age students are receiving VR services, the key stakeholder groups all identify issues regarding the extent to which they are available to students in secondary and postsecondary settings. An area of agreement across all stakeholder groups is that youth with disabilities and their families are not always aware that their children may be eligible for VR services during their high school years. For many students, it is not until their final year in high school that the school requests approval from the family for a referral to the local VR agency.

For example, a VR counselor/transition coordinator from a small state in the Northeast reported having great success in being able to complete formal intakes, attend IEP meetings, and work successfully with special education staff at least 18 months prior to an individual's graduation or exit from secondary education. Yet all other VR transition coordinators interviewed expressed great concern because of the impossibility of meeting the demand for involvement in the transition IEP process by VR counselors. This concern was shared by key stakeholders in all groups.

Funding is needed to hire more VR counselors so the wait time for service for transitioning youth is decreased.

Education transition key stakeholder from a state in the West

VR counselors are overwhelmed—service level varies from one locality to the next.

Parent key stakeholder from a state in the Northeast

In addition to the lack of a sufficient number of counselors available to serve the transitioning youth population across the United States, stakeholders also expressed concern that there is inequality in how VR service units are assigned between the direct services that an adult might receive and the service units for the time that a VR counselor spends in nondirect activities on behalf of youth, such as in meetings and collaborating with teachers and school personnel.

In very few states or localities of key stakeholders, there are specified transition VR counselors at the local level who are assigned to local education agencies (i.e., local school districts). For the other key stakeholder states, VR services are only provided to transition-age youth upon request of the parent or when initiated by the school.

Issues also were identified when VR counselor changeover occurs and accurate historical information may not be used by others involved in the VR process.

I did not see [Department of Rehabilitative Services counselor] again until the summer before graduation when my son was invited to participate in the center-based weeklong rehabilitative assessment process....The assessment findings concluded that my son was eligible for segregated facility-based or supported employment but that he would not be a candidate for competitive employment. By this time he had been employed competitively for 18 months [through the IEP process in which VR participated].

Parent key stakeholder from a mid-Atlantic state

During my sophomore or junior year of high school, I received a new counselor from [VR Services for the Blind]....VR counselors need to be more attuned to the needs of their individual clients. [I am] blind, yet my VR counselor put a handwritten note on a document and sent it to me in the mail.

Transition-age key stakeholder from a state in the Northeast

The need for consistency within and across states of how VR services are made available to transition-age youth was a shared theme among a number of VR key stakeholders. For example, one state VR key stakeholder indicated, “In most areas of our state, our local counselors are directly involved in the development of transition planning and the delivery of transition services to eligible transition-age youth in secondary schools. However, there is not a clearly defined process for how [VR] receives referrals for secondary students with disabilities.

I think we need to look at how transition caseloads differ from adult caseloads and the RSA data collection [that] may not allow for that flexibility in terms of looking at outcomes prior to a 26 closure.

VR key stakeholder from a state in the Northeast

Summary of Key Findings of Research Question 1

The number of transition-age youth served by VR has increased steadily over the past five years. For these individuals, employment rates and earnings appear reasonable given the age and prior work experience of this population. At the same time, it appears that VR is serving only a small percentage of youth who could potentially benefit from transition services. Unfortunately, available data are insufficient to develop precise estimates of the number, characteristics, or service needs of transition-age youth potentially able to access and benefit from VR services.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: How have particular VR services correlated with successful employment outcomes, and how do existing definitions of successful case outcomes influence the range and content of transition services provided in the field? What are the outcomes from VR’s substantial investments in postsecondary training of consumers with disabilities?

VR services are defined as any services described in an IPE toward securing a reasonable employment outcome. The state plans required by the Rehabilitation Act must provide for the development and implementation of IPEs for eligible individuals (34 CFR 361.45). An IPE is required to contain, among other things, “a description of the

specific employment outcome that is chosen by the eligible individual, consistent with [his or her] unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice” (29 USC 722[b][3][A]).

The study did not uncover data that correlate specific VR services with employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. Available data confirm the increased success that results from participation in postsecondary education and training and document VR’s support of youth pursuing postsecondary education and training opportunities.

Benefits of Postsecondary Education

Obtaining higher levels of education have clear positive impacts on employment rates, though at lower rates than individuals without disabilities (see **Table 13**).

TABLE 13

Rates of Employment for People with Disabilities by Level of Educational Achievement: Individuals with Disabilities Versus Individuals Without Disabilities

Education Level	Labor Market Participation for Individuals:	
	With Disabilities	Without Disabilities
Less than a high school diploma	29.9%	61.7%
High school diploma	50.5%	82.5%
Some postsecondary education	60.1%	83.7%
At least four years of college	72.2%	88.5%

Source: Stodden, Roberts, Picklesimer, Jackson, & Chang, 2006.

Evidence from analyses of general labor force data indicate that increasing levels of education result in higher rates of labor force participation and employment. Data from the RSA 911 report show two dimensions of postsecondary education for VR consumers—receiving college and university training through the VR program and level of education attained at closure (representing the level of education the individual had attained when the individual exited the VR services program). For consumers who received college or university training through the VR program, we do not find

substantially different rehabilitation rates. That is, 57 percent of individuals who receive college and university training exit the VR program with an employment outcome nationally, as compared to 58 percent of exiting VR consumers overall. However, for those who attain some level of postsecondary education prior to case closure, we find that rehabilitation rates are higher than the overall national rate, 64 percent versus 58 percent (Institute for Community Inclusion, n.d.).

Participation in the labor market through VR services necessarily requires continued participation in VR services until an employment outcome is achieved. The number one reason a VR case is closed is not due to a successful employment outcome, but because the consumer decides to end participation with VR services. Determining why VR consumers exit the program prior to a successful outcome is difficult to ascertain because data collection is lacking. The RSA Consumer Satisfaction Report found 80–90 percent satisfaction in such areas as perceived interest by counselor, time to develop complete plan, and counselor knowledge of available programs (RSA-PA, 2007). However, the survey is done with the consumers who remain active on the VR roles, not all, consumers. Further, some states, such as Pennsylvania, only send consumer satisfaction surveys to consumers who exit the program with a successful employment outcome (RSA-PA, 2007).

Recent estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau indicate that people with bachelor's degrees will earn approximately \$600,000 more during their lifetime than those without an undergraduate degree. This estimate was cited by Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley in his statement before Congress during the most recent authorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965. He noted:

More than ever before, education is the fault line between those who will prosper in the new economy, and those who will be left behind. Today's jobs increasingly require skills and training beyond a high school education, and accessible postsecondary education is critically important to individuals as well as our Nation's economy and democracy. (Price-Ellingstad & Berry, 1999, p. 1, quoting Riley, 1997)

Recent statistics from the Department of Labor (**Table 14**) confirm that Riley's statements are accurate. Fewer than half of citizens without at least a high school diploma are participating in the labor force (i.e., either employed or seeking employment) and only 43.2 percent are employed. Increases in education level correspond with increases in labor force participation and employment rates.

TABLE 14
**Employment Statistics by Education Level, Civilian Population:
With and Without Disabilities, Ages 25 and Older**

Education Level	Participation Rate	Employment Rate
Less than a high school diploma	46.8%	43.2%
High school graduate, no college	62.6%	59.8%
Some college or associate degree	72.0%	69.6%
Bachelor's degree or higher	77.6%	75.9%

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, 2007.

Students with Disabilities Supported in Postsecondary Education by VR

Data analyses from the RSA 911 data reveal that nationwide, 12.7 percent of VR consumers ages 16 to 25 receive postsecondary education and training. Across states, the rate varies from under 5 percent (Virginia, New Hampshire, Colorado) to over 25 percent (Utah, Arkansas, West Virginia, Nebraska, New Mexico). As noted previously, pursuit of postsecondary education is statistically related to youth engagement in their high school education (Wagner et al., 2007). However, youth with disabilities have substantially lower academic achievement as compared with their peers without disabilities. A decade ago, a 1998 Harris Survey, found that approximately 20 percent of adults with disabilities have not completed high school, compared to 9 percent of adults without disabilities (Price-Ellingstad & Berry, 1999). Fifty-nine percent of youth with disabilities report that school is “not very hard” or “not hard at all.” Sixty-eight percent report enjoying school “a lot” or “pretty much.” The youth with disabilities most likely to be eligible for VR services are the most likely to report school being “pretty hard” or “very hard” (Wagner et al., 2007).

The National Center for Educational Statistics reported in 2001 that enrollment in four-year postsecondary institutions by students with disabilities had been declining since 1994, but that enrollment in community colleges and vocational colleges continued to steadily increase (Wehman & Yasuda, 2005). For example, in 2004, the percentage of students with disabilities in California's community college system was 3.86 percent in comparison with the California State University system (2.45 percent) and the University of California system (1.48 percent) (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 2008).

One reason for this could be that community colleges have traditionally served the most diverse population (Rioux-Bailey, 2004) and many have open enrollment policies. In addition to having more flexible admission policies, community colleges tend to provide more individualized services for students with disabilities than do four-year colleges and universities (Wehman & Yasuda, 2005). Cocci (1997) reports that two-year colleges provide more assistance by increased access to academic accommodations, assistive technology, counseling, tutoring, and assessment. With the higher level of academic support, it is likely that VR provides tuition support for a greater number of transition-age consumers attending two-year than four-year institutions, but no data were found to support this.

Although significant progress has been made to increase successful transition to employment following entrance into and completion of postsecondary education for students with disabilities, there is still much to be done (Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer, & Acosta, 2005). Youth with disabilities struggle to obtain and maintain employment. For those youth employed, the jobs are more likely to be part-time, and they are more likely to be fired as compared to youth without disabilities (Garcia-Iriate, Blacazar, & Taylor-Ritzler, 2007). The National Council on Disability in 2000 concluded that "the data on the employment of youth with disabilities showed little change in the status of those who exit school prepared to enter the workforce" (NCD, 2000).

VR Funding Support for Postsecondary Education

With regard to VR funding of postsecondary education, **Table 15** indicates the numbers of consumers ages 16 to 25 for whom the state VR agency provided some level of funding for postsecondary education or training between the years 2002 and 2006 as is collected in the RSA 911 database.

TABLE 15
**Percentage of VR Consumers
Ages 16 to 25 Receiving
Postsecondary Education**

FY	%
2002	17.1%
2003	17.9%
2004	21.1%
2005	21.9%
2006	22.3%

Source: Institute for Community Inclusion, n.d.

As Table 15 indicates, VR agencies as a whole have steadily increased the percentage of consumers in this age range for whom service funds are being directed to postsecondary education, a very positive trend given the documented financial benefits of higher education on earning potential. Further analysis of this data indicates that in 2002, four states provided funding for postsecondary education to less than 10 percent of consumers in this age range: Virginia (5.2 percent), South Carolina (7.6 percent), Colorado (7.8 percent), and Mississippi (8.2 percent). However, six states provided funding for 40 percent or more of their consumers in this age range: Utah (44.9 percent), Tennessee (44 percent), Wyoming (43.7 percent), Arkansas (42.3 percent), Nebraska (40.5 percent), and West Virginia (40.0 percent).

ED provided \$2.6 billion in FY 2005 in VR grants to the states and territories based on a formula that considers the state's population and per capita income (GAO, 2007). Yet, many state VR agencies have been financially challenged to the point of being unable to fund services for significant periods, leaving VR participants

adrift in their rehabilitation plans or on a basic services waiting list. As evidenced by the “order of selection” practice, funding limitations can have a major influence on who receives services and how those services are delivered (Fraser, Vandergoot, Thomas, & Wagner, 2004).

Funding for state transition efforts not related to workgroups or task forces comes mostly from the individual state departments of vocational rehabilitation (23 states) and education (22 states). Other funding sources listed by states include Medicaid, Workforce Investment Act, National Governors Association’s Center for Best Practices, grants, state departments of social services, local businesses, the Vocational and Technical Education Act, workforce commissions, a state division of public assistance, the Social Security Administration, and a state department of employment security. Under the Perkins Act, as amended, Congress has appropriated more than \$1.1 billion for grants to states. In recent years, states have chosen to allocate an average of 40 percent to postsecondary education, with some states allocating as little as 10 percent (Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006).

VR receives funding from many sources, and as noted above, those sources all have different objectives and requirements. The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability (NCWD/Youth) advocates the creation of strategies to allow the “blending and braiding of funds and resources.” The ability to combine funds toward a single goal will naturally create a system of improved flexibility, coordination, and sustainability (NCWD/Youth, 2006). None of the stakeholder organizations can afford to independently fund the services VR consumers require. Pooled resources toward unified goals identified by VR consumers will result from necessary cross-system collaboration (NCWD/Youth, 2006, quoting National Governors Association, 2004). Combining resources requires stakeholder groups to forfeit some degree of control, a complicating factor given their own reporting requirements. However, government support of combined resources has identified benefits: expanding employer connections; shared fiscal responsibility; establishing joint processes and procedures; flexible funding for mentoring efforts; service integration for transitioning youth;

consolidated approach to service delivery and information sharing; and establishing a broker of resources.

Findings from the Key Stakeholders: Employment and Postsecondary Education Outcomes

VR involvement with youth who are transitioning to postsecondary education received favorable comments from key stakeholders and families who have received financial support for tuition and assistive technology.

The Special Education Transition Counselor in my daughter's school referred her to VR when she was a junior. There was excellent communication between my daughter and her VR counselor who fully participated in the development of my daughter's transition plan. VR paid for the assistive technology that my daughter needed for college, and paid for a community college course needed as an alternative to her college's language requirement. My daughter finished college in six years and is currently successfully self-employed and in graduate school. VR services ended when my daughter started her own business.

Parent key stakeholder from the Northeast

Other key stakeholders pointed out that participation in postsecondary education does not automatically lead to employment for all individuals with disabilities. Many of the same issues encountered by youth who desire employment after high school are faced after completion of postsecondary education.

My son attended private school until graduation. He became involved with VR as he was applying for college. VR funded his tuition, for which we were very grateful. After graduation from college, my son remained unemployed for several years. During that time, VR made sporadic contact and provided him with lists of available jobs. At one point, on his own, my son returned to school for a brief period. Eventually he found employment on his own.

Parent key stakeholder from the Southeast

Summary of Key Findings of Research Question 2

Prior research efforts have not documented the effectiveness of specific VR services in promoting employment outcomes of transition-age youth. While the results of multiple

demonstrations reveal promising practices, no rigorous studies using experimental designs or comparison groups have been completed. Available data clearly confirm that VR agencies provide considerable support for individuals with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education. Further, prior research documents the increased success that results from participation in postsecondary education and training, although problems related to selection bias in study samples limit the usefulness of these investigations.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: To what extent has the Department of Education's Monitoring Redesign Initiative promoted the transition of students from school to employment and school to postsecondary education within the vocational rehabilitation system?

Section 107 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, requires that the Rehabilitation Services Administration conduct annual reviews and periodic onsite monitoring of programs authorized under Title I of the act. The goal of these reviews is to determine compliance with the assurances made in the state VR agency's state plan and the evaluation standards and performance indicators established under Section 106 of the act (ED/OSEP, 2005). In 2005, RSA implemented a new structure for completing this monitoring function. The State Monitoring and Program Improvement Division (SMPID) of RSA was given responsibility for monitoring seven of RSA's formula grant programs, to include the Title I Basic VR state grants and the Supported Employment (SE) state grants.

In order to fulfill its monitoring responsibilities, RSA, through state teams made up of staff from the SMPID:

- Reviews the state agency's performance in assisting eligible individuals with disabilities to achieve high-quality employment and independent living (IL) outcomes
- Develops, jointly with the state agency, performance and compliance goals as well as strategies to achieve those goals

- Provides technical assistance to the state agency in order to improve its performance, meet its goals, and fulfill its state plan assurances

During a monitoring review of a state VR agency's performance, the state team from SMPID:

- Gathers and reviews information regarding state agency performance
- Identifies a wide range of VR and IL stakeholders and invites them to provide input into the review process
- Conducts onsite visits and holds discussions with state agency staff, State Rehabilitation Council members, State Independent Living Council members, and stakeholders to share information and identify promising practices and areas for improvement
- Provides technical assistance to the state agency
- Works with the state agency to develop goals, strategies, and evaluation methods to address performance issues
- Makes recommendations to the state agency
- Identifies potential issues for further review
- Identifies the technical assistance that RSA would provide to help improve the performance of the state's VR, SE, and IL programsⁱ

The state-specific RSA FY 2007 Monitoring Reports on the Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living Programs prepared by RSA staff are posted at <http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/rehab/107-reports/2007/index.html>. As of June 2008, the site contained monitoring reports for 15 states and two territories. These reports were reviewed for specific references to VR services to transition-age individuals. The following are examples of the type of transition indicators being noted during the RSA performance reviews.

Examples of Promising Practices

Based on the monitoring reports described above, RSA identified and posted on its Web site a description of 10 specific promising practices for transitioning youth.ⁱⁱ Several of these promising practices are described in detail later in this section.

Alabama	College Preparation Programs Career Preparation and Training Initiative (CPTI)
Maryland	Transitioning Youth
Nebraska	Transition Scholarships
Pennsylvania	Participation in the Pennsylvania Community on Transition
Rhode Island	Shared Youth Vision Federal Collaborative Partnership Statewide Partnerships Leveraging Resources and Maximizing Access to Services for Transitioning Youth
South Dakota	Leveraging Resources and Maximizing Access to Services for Transition-Age Youth Through Statewide Partnerships
Vermont	Jump on Board for Success (JOBS) Learn, Earn and Prosper (LEAP)

Identified Issues in Serving Transitioning Youth

RSA also uses the monitoring reviews to identify issues impacting delivery of VR services to transitioning youth. Examples drawn from the review of FY 2007 state monitoring reports are as follows:

Alabama. Regarding the expansion of Supported Employment services for students reaching the age of 21 and the connection to resources and ongoing support for clients exiting the school system; Alabama Department of Rehabilitative Services needs consistent connection and outreach to community resources beyond the existing supported employment projects; funding to serve the most severe clients in need of SE

services; and consistent interagency coordination across the state. Also, concerns were raised related to the quality of job placement services for consumers completing college degree programs.

Georgia. One explanation for Georgia's difficulty in meeting and exceeding performance indicator 1.5ⁱⁱⁱ may be the focus it places on serving transition-age individuals with disabilities. The percentage of transition-age individuals with disabilities served in comparison to the total number of individuals served in Georgia in 2005 is approximately 60 percent higher than the national average. In 2005, 43.6 percent of the total number of individuals served by Georgia Department of Labor and Vocational Rehabilitation (GADOLVR) were transition-age individuals. The national average in 2005 was 26.4 percent. Transition-age individuals with IEPs referred from secondary schools usually include high percentages of individuals with cognitive impairments or mental illness. For GADOLVR in FY 2006, 1,658 of the 2,182 transition-age individuals who achieved an employment outcome were individuals with some type of mental impairment, and the majority of these were individuals with mental retardation and severe and chronic mental illness. These individuals are most often receiving SSI and relying on Medicaid for services that maintain them in the community. However, the need for Medicaid support means that individuals risk losing needed benefits if earnings exceed Medicaid eligibility guidelines. For a combination of reasons, these individuals typically earn low wages, and in Georgia they appear to be primarily placed into entry-level jobs that pay close to minimum wage.

Pennsylvania. The report for the Pennsylvania state VR agency monitoring review is an example of RSA noting an issue and then working with the state on a response plan.

Issue: Transition-Age Youth. During FY 2005, Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) served 4,926 transition-age youth representing 26.04 percent of the total of the number of individuals served by OVR. In FY 2006, PA OVR served 5,033 transition-age youth representing 26.55 percent of the total number of individuals served. The rehabilitation rate for transition youth also increased from 57.23 percent in FY 2005, to 59.45 percent in FY 2006, as a result of an increase from 2,819 successful

outcomes in FY 2005, to 2,992 successful outcomes in FY 2006. The national employment rate for 16- to 24-year-old youth reported by the U.S. Department of Labor in the summer of 2006 was 88.8 percent.

Providing services that result in the successful transition of youth to employment outcomes is a significant issue for OVR. Transition-age youth represent a substantial percentage of the total number of individuals OVR serves. During the onsite visit, OVR staff expressed concern about tracking youth who participate in programs conducted through the PA Community on Transition. In FY 2006, 1,288 youth cases were closed after determination of eligibility for services without an IPE being developed, or after development of the IPE without receiving services. Data regarding participation and outcomes could be used to maximize resources and improve programs.

In addition, issues such as those related to the provision of services and policy development, which were expressed by stakeholders during the monitoring process, have implications for providing services to transition-age youth that result in quality employment outcomes.

Goal: Close the gap between the rehabilitation rate of transition-age youth with disabilities and the employment rate of all youth.

Strategies: Three specific actions designed to improve program outcomes were identified.

1. Hire new transition coordinator by October 1, 2007, to continue to enhance effective collaborative relationships with state and federal entities serving youth, and family and student organizations.
2. Develop and implement common data elements with collaborating partners to enhance tracking and reporting capabilities.
3. Analyze data to assess impact of collaborative activities on outcomes.

Method of Evaluation: OVR will be successful as the gap between the rehabilitation rate of transition-age youth with disabilities and the employment rate of all youth is closed.

Technical Assistance: RSA will provide technical assistance on measurement of progress and outcomes.

Each state report also contains a table providing longitudinal trend data for approximately 16 performance indicators. Two of the data indicators were specific to VR services for transition-age youth. The following example (**Table 16**) of the transition-specific trend data is taken from the Pennsylvania report.

TABLE 16
**Example of the Transition-Specific Trend Data
from the Pennsylvania Report**

PENNSYLVANIA	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Percentage of transition-age served to total served	25.89%	25.01%	25.30%	26.04%	26.55%
Employment rate for transition-age served	67.86%	66.82%	62.53%	57.23%	59.45%

Source: RSA-PA, 2007.

Summary of Key Findings of Research Question 3

The RSA redesign of its state monitoring process has put in place a system that appears to work closely with state agencies in reviewing performance in relation to state plan goals and objectives. Performance strengths are noted. Promising practices of potential value to other states are identified, collected, and disseminated. Performance issues are also identified and corrective action plans are developed. The actual impact of the monitoring redesign in terms of strengthening VR services, including services to transition-age youth cannot be objectively determined at this early stage in the implementation of the redesign process.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4: How effective has VR been in collaborating with other agencies in achieving its transition results? What are the outcomes from VR's collaboration with secondary and postsecondary programs?

Congress intended the Rehabilitation Act to foster the collaboration of rehabilitation and educational services:

[The Rehabilitation Act is intended to] ensure that all students who require VR services receive those services in a timely manner. There should be no gap in services between the educational system and the VR system. Thus, an individual's [IPE] should be completed before the individual leaves the school system.... The Committee wishes to reiterate that the VR program should use information from the public schools if that information reflects the current status and abilities of the student. Coordination between agencies regarding the adequacy of data needed by each agency will save time and money. The Committee also intends that the [IPE] be coordinated with an IEP for such students with disabilities (Senate Report 102-357, pp. 33–34, as cited in NCD, 2000).

Ideally, transition services should be a coordinated effort of multiple agencies to support the individual across many aspects of life (Rutkowski, Daston, Van Kuiken, & Riehle, 2006). The Rehabilitation Act allows agencies to enter into third-party agreements with other state or local agencies to coordinate the services provided to their common program participants (GAO, 2005). The call for interagency coordination and cooperation in the transition process is a strong thread throughout the transition initiatives and related federal legislation (deFur & Reiff, 1994). Youth with disabilities who ranked the importance of various issues related to transition did not list a strictly academic concern among their top choices. Rather, youth were concerned with health services, knowledge about reasonable accommodations and reliable transportation, and self-assertion and self-advocacy techniques (NCD, 2003). Through collaborative relationships, the VR counselor can guide the transitioning youth toward success with all employment-related goals.

The most recent authorizations of the Rehabilitation Act and IDEIA allow state agencies to determine the role of vocational rehabilitation counselors in the transition

process for students of various ages. The result is wide variation in programs, practice, and outcomes. The National Council on Disability (2004a) also notes that transition services are one of the best strategies for improving the quality of school programs and post-school outcomes experienced by students with disabilities, but it is the least often used. Despite government efforts to address transition through more effective cooperation between educational, rehabilitation, and other adult service systems, smooth transition from secondary school to post-school pursuits for people with disabilities has remained elusive in many cases (NCD, 2004a).

Collaboration and Participation in the Transition IEP Planning Process

Consistent involvement and participation of the appropriate individuals is essential for effective transition. **Table 17** shows that parents actively participate in the transition planning process 84.9 percent of the time. Special education teachers actively participate 97.4 percent of the time. Vocational rehabilitation counselors participate 14.3 percent of the time. Fewer than 1 in 10 students up to age 16 are reported to have a VR counselor actively involved in transition planning, compared with one in four students who are 17 or 18 years old (NLTS2, 2005). Yet, VR counselor participation is higher than the participation of other outside agencies.

Of all the contacts made by school staff on behalf of students with transition planning, the state VR agencies were the most frequently contacted (37.8 percent). The second most frequently contacted agency is the Social Security Administration (11.5 percent) (NLTS2, 2005). Fifty-six percent of those 17 or 18 years old report that the school system contacted the state VR agency on their behalf, whereas only 16 percent of 15-year-olds had the agency contacted on their behalf.

TABLE 17
**Active Participants in Transition Planning
for Students with a Transition Plan**

	Percentage with Active Participation	Years of Age			
		14	15	16	17–18
Parent/guardian	85%	79%	88%	86%	85%
Special Education Teacher	97%	97%	97%	98%	97%
General Education Teacher	59%	59%	64%	55%	58%
Gen. Ed. Vocational Teacher	31%	20%	24%	30%	40%
School Counselor	61%	49%	62%	60%	66%
Related Services Personnel	18%	12%	20%	25%	16%
School Administrator	56%	48%	44%	58%	63%
Vocational Rehab. Counselors	14%	3%	5%	10%	25%
Others	17%	15%	11%	18%	20%

Source: NLTS2, 2004.

Collaboration in the Implementation of the Transition IEP

Quality VR services provide consumers the ability to exercise choice in determining their career goals and identifying the support services necessary to achieve these goals (Wilson, 2003). The identification of preferences leading to placement in preferred jobs is important to obtaining and maintaining employment and is required by the Rehabilitation Act (Morgan and Ellerd, 2005). Fundamental to achieving satisfactory postsecondary education or employment through VR counselor assistance is the alignment of consumer and counselor expectations at the beginning of the process. McMahon, Shaw, Chan, and Danczyk-Hawley (2004) recommend that counselors be trained on an instrument that recognizes divergent expectations, such as the Expectancies About Rehabilitation Counseling Scale.

The Rehabilitation Act allows agencies to enter into third-party agreements with other state or local agencies to coordinate the services provided to their common program participants (GAO, 2005). NCD (2000) reported that documented models of

multidisciplinary, coordinated, and accountable service systems that meet local requirements are urgently needed to close the gaps between post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities and the general population.

IDEA established new parameters intended to smooth the transition of students with disabilities from secondary school to higher education and work. NCD (2004b) asserts that only by making educators and rehabilitation providers equally and jointly responsible for the success or failure of transition can accountability be achieved. Across the country, state VR agencies are working to establish relationships with local education agencies and workforce development initiatives that smooth the transition process of students from school to work (Wilson, 2003). NCWD/Youth (2006) cited significant variation in levels of coordination between schools and VR agencies, with several states acknowledging that their coordination efforts are yet underway. Support in the postsecondary education environment also lacks coordination. A 2005 survey of several dozen postsecondary students with disabilities had a predictable finding that “students would be better served at postsecondary institutions if there were a more comprehensive network of support services, working cooperatively to support students with disabilities and educating peers and faculty” (Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer, & Acosta, 2005).

In the NCWD/Youth (2006) survey of states, 3 of the 25 responding states reported having developed formal interagency and collaborative agreements to increase the scope and effectiveness of transition services offered. These states were Arizona, California, and Louisiana. Nine of the states reported systems of coordination between various state and local agencies. Four states reported having significant coordination efforts underway. Many of the states indicated that improving the level and channels of communication between various parties involved in transition efforts to be a major goal, and 22 indicated that further technical assistance would be useful toward this goal.

NCWD/Youth found in its 2006 report that collaboration is not simply a matter of creating partnership. Each stakeholder group will have its own set of goals and expectations regarding transition for youth. The funding sources for each party also vary, and the funding sources may have their own goals, desired outcomes, and bureaucracies.

NCWD (2006) further contends that transition-age youth should be informed about health care options and transportation services and other available resources for whatever supports they need. Vocational rehabilitation, vocational education, and special education are essential in the transition process (deFur & Reiff, 1994).

Recent OSERS Initiatives with Federal Partners

OSERS reports (H. Berry, personal communication, February 5, 2008) that it has initiated and supported numerous transition activities and projects to improve the overall statewide service delivery system for youth with disabilities. Many of these activities are coordinated and administered in partnership with other federal programs.

A review of federal documents reveals that OSERS established working relationships and participates in collaborative activities with other federal agencies that have a focus on improving educational, independent living, and employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. Specifically, representatives from OSERS are active members in the Interagency Committee on Disability Research/Interagency Subcommittee on Employment, the Federal Partners in Transition Workgroup, the Youth Vision Federal Collaborative Partnership, and the New Freedom Initiative Workgroup. The agencies involved in these and other activities include the Departments of Education, Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), Agriculture, Transportation, Justice, and Housing and Urban Development and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

As a result of these relationships and collaborative efforts, the following events or activities have been achieved as reported by OSERS (H. Berry, personal communication, February 5, 2008):

- RSA hosted the 2006 National Employment Conference, “Transition into High-Demand Job Sectors.” The conference brought business and industry leaders together with representatives of the public VR agencies and other stakeholders with an interest in the transition and employment of youth with disabilities.

- RSA issued the 28th Institute on Rehabilitation Issues Document, “Investing in the Transition of Youth with Disabilities to Productive Careers.” A prime study group composed of youth with disabilities, parents of youth with disabilities, educators, and rehabilitation and employment professionals authored this document. The document provides information and perspectives on the philosophy, vision, legislative authorities, and community foundation for transition services.
- OSERS began the Youth to Work Coalition (YWC) with Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation more than three years ago. Many businesses and organizations have joined the Youth to Work Coalition to increase internship opportunities in the private sector for students with disabilities.
- The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET), a technical assistance center funded by OSERS’s Office of Special Education Programs, sponsored a National Leadership Summit in 2003, in collaboration with 15 federal programs and national organizations. The purpose of the national summit was to provide a forum for states to increase their capacity to work collaboratively on improving outcomes for youth with disabilities.
- In addition, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Research to Practice Division supports a number of technical assistance centers that have impact on the field of secondary transition. As a whole, these centers address OSEP’s Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) indicators to improve graduation and dropout rates for students with disabilities.
- In FY 2003, the RSA senior management team identified the transition of youth with disabilities from school to work as a major focus in the conduct of monitoring 80 state VR agencies. All onsite review teams followed a monitoring guide that addressed VR agency performance in the implementation of transition services to youth with disabilities to achieve employment outcomes and to determine compliance with the assurances made in the state plan.

- OSEP redesigned its accountability system into a Continuous Improvement Focused Monitoring System (CIFMS) that incorporates strategies designed to ensure compliance and improve performance under Part B of the IDEA, foster greater state accountability, increase parental involvement, and establish a data-driven process to inform improvement planning. Implementation of the CIFMS has increased accountability, ensured public involvement, focused on processes with the strongest relationship to positive results, and increased emphasis on improving academic and post-school outcomes for children with disabilities.
- Also, the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) leads initiatives on addressing transition needs. NIDRR awarded a grant to focus on transitioning youth who are deaf and severely hearing impaired; and a grant was awarded to evaluate the implementation of transition services delivered by VR agencies that serve only individuals with significant visual impairments.
- In March 2007, the Office of Civil Rights issued a booklet titled "Transition of Students with Disabilities to Postsecondary Education: A Guide for High School Educators." The purpose of this booklet is to inform educators about the rights and responsibilities of students with disabilities and to facilitate their transition from high school to postsecondary environments. The booklet is available at www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transitionguide.html.

VR Participation in the Shared Youth Vision Collaborative Partnership

In 2003, a White House report identified a lack of communication and coordination among federal agencies serving youth, resulting in the nation's neediest youth not having successful employment outcomes despite the expenditure of billions of public and private funds (DOLETA, 2007). The Employment and Training Administration within the U.S. Department of Labor (DOLETA), in response to this report, formed the federal Shared Youth Vision Collaborative Partnership (SYV) with the Departments of Education, Agriculture, Justice, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Transportation and the Social Security Administration and Corporation for National and Community Service (DOLETA, 2007). In 2006, OSERS became a partner in addition to

other representation from ED when DOL issued guidance that expanded the focus of the interagency SYV group to include American Indian youth and youth with disabilities (G. Weltz, personal communication, April 29, 2008).

Although the SYV was initiated at the federal level, states and local areas play the critical role in facilitating the outcomes of the youth that are served. There are no federal mandates that states and localities are required to meet, only that they are to develop a coordinated approach that works for their own region for serving the neediest youth with a braided funding approach (DOLETA, 2007). Currently there are pilot SVY teams in 12 states in which VR is a participant, four of which (Rhode Island, Vermont, Minnesota, and Iowa) list youth with disabilities as one of their target populations. A number of SYV teams in which VR has a role also have representation of Disability Program Navigators, created through DOL funding (G. Weltz, personal communication, April 29, 2008).

Findings from the Key Stakeholders: VR Collaboration with Other Agencies

An overarching theme that became apparent early in the key stakeholder interview process is the lack of information about the transition process and the role of VR in this process that is made available to students and families. Parents, consumers, and educators shared this view. In general, key stakeholders reported that VR services do reflect the principles of self-determination and consumer choice. One parent took issue with this by stating that her son did not benefit from the self-directed services model that VR employed. A consumer key stakeholder felt strongly that it should be up to the student to make decisions concerning career choice and planning that were part of the IEP planning process.

Although every VR key stakeholder identified efforts that are being made at the state and local level to collaborate with local school districts, a disconnect remains between the educational system and VR, according to education and consumer key stakeholders. There continue to be differences in expectations among all key stakeholder groups regarding the services and level of involvement that VR can currently provide to

transition-age youth. Education personnel want more communication with VR counselors, a consistent referral process, and more work-based learning opportunities provided through VR for their students. One transition-age consumer wants high school students with disabilities to automatically receive VR services and recommends that the services be student directed. All key stakeholders did agree that increased funding to support increased capacity of the VR counselor workforce would allow for increased collaborative efforts on the part of local VR agencies.

Key stakeholders were specifically asked about VR's relation to other community service providers, yet very few of them talked about the relationship among agencies at the local level. It was stated that community agencies need to talk more to each other and that a common intake/eligibility determination process would be helpful. One parent did discuss the relationship between the local VR agency and the services that were contracted for through a community employment vendor.

...it should be noted that DRS services are only as good as the vendor with whom they contract. Though the DRS counselor was intuitive, supportive, and viewed my son as a potential member of the labor force, the vendor was another story....Where I was seeking information to help better direct instruction and related services with an employment outcome, the conclusion of the vendor simply closed a door....At the interpretive meeting the vendor's position was to shut doors rather than encourage skill development.

Parent key stakeholder from a mid-Atlantic state

This same parent went on to describe what happened five years later when her son was approaching the age of 21.

Subsequent experiences with another vendor demonstrated to me the awesome differences in attitudes in those who conduct assessments. A second vendor...conducted assessments and found that he [the son] had great strengths and was clearly employable. With her findings in hand and her assistance at the IEP meeting, the employment coordinator with the school took my son on two job interviews. At the second interview he was hired and has been employed there for four years.

Transportation was the most frequently identified barrier within community service systems, followed closely by the issues regarding Social Security disability

benefits and the fear that families have of planning for employment for their sons or daughters at the cost of losing benefits.

In a recent survey, OVR transition counselors, school staff, and OVR branch managers overwhelmingly said that the primary obstacles to eligible transition-age consumers obtaining a positive employment outcome are a lack of support from parent/guardians, consumer dependence on SSI/SSDI and a lack of job opportunities....

...It is very difficult to foster support from parents/guardians for their child to obtain employment when they often rely on their child's SSI earnings to boost their household income....It is difficult to continuously promote SSA work incentives to suspicious consumers who feel secure in receiving a monthly check, which they often went through an arduous process to obtain.

State VR key stakeholder

Key stakeholders across all categories referred to the misunderstanding of families regarding Social Security disability benefits and how this misinformation and fear often influence the transition process.

Summary of Key Findings of Research Question 4

Results clearly indicate the VR is an active partner with special education and postsecondary educational institutions in the delivery of services to transition-age youth. RSA is involved in a number of collaborative efforts with other federal agencies. However, both the quantitative and qualitative data reviewed indicated that lack of personnel, service unit credit policies, and dedicated transition units in local rehabilitation agencies limit the impact and effectiveness of VR collaboration with other agencies involved in service delivery.

RESEARCH QUESTION 5: How effective has the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and RSA leadership been in the implementation of the law over the past 30 years, particularly with respect to transition from school to work and collaboration with the postsecondary educational system?

In accordance with the Rehabilitation Act, the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) conducts annual reviews and periodic onsite monitoring of programs authorized under Title I of the act to gauge compliance with the act and with evaluation standards and performance indicators established under Section 106 of the act. This review is published by the United States Department of Education. Also, in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act, each state publishes an annual report detailing its program activities and outcomes.

RSA monitored 23 states in FY 2007 and identified several states as implementing “promising practices.” These practices are unique to the VR agencies providing them, and are intended to serve as models for other states (RSA, 2007). These states are not touted as being highly effective overall, but may represent states that are among the most innovative and progressive. Each state’s “promising practices” are summarized, and each state is examined for overall efficacy over numerous years. For each state examined here, some of the RSA (2007) monitoring data and the states’ annual reports will be summarized. While the RSA monitoring data provide the same categorical data for all states, each state’s individual report may have some data that are different from what another state reports.

Alabama. RSA identified Alabama as a state with a promising practice known as a Career Preparation and Training Initiative (CPTI). Since 2003, for two weeks each summer Alabama Department of Rehabilitative Services (ADRS) hosts a training session focusing on seniors planning to enter the workforce following high school. ADRS partners with local school systems, transportation agencies, local colleges, and employers to introduce youth to the world of work. Students participate in team-building activities, employment site tours, potential employer visits, tours of two-year colleges, socialization activities, and discussions on getting and maintaining employment. Each student’s counselor is required to participate, a feature that RSA specifically praised. In its fourth summer, ADRS processed 114 applications for the program. Per RSA-AL (2007), this pilot program is expanding to other Alabama and out-of-state locations.

Alabama reports that in 2005 it served 17,112 transitioning students with disabilities and rehabilitated 2,819 on a \$2.5 million budget. Transitioning students were one-third of all the individuals ADRS served and placed in employment. Eighty full-time job coaches—possible through joint funding—served 75 school districts, assisting transitioning students. Approximately 67 percent of the 600 ADRS transitioning consumers who participated in supported employment successfully achieved an employment outcome. The ADRS 2006 annual report highlights specialized services for students with specific learning disabilities or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, the college preparatory program, and collaboration projects with Children’s Rehabilitative Service, Department of Youth Services, Department of Corrections, and the Special Education Division of the Alabama Department of Education.

Maryland. Maryland Department of Rehabilitative Services (DORS) assigns a counselor to each public secondary school in the state to promote effective transition. Of course, it requires DORS to complete an IPE for eligible students with disabilities who can be served under the order of selection prior to school exit (RSA-MD, 2007). Maryland youth who remain in school are referred to DORS during the fall semester of their next-to-last year in secondary school (RSA-MD, 2007).

Maryland was recognized for its “outreach to youth with disabilities, funding of services for eligible youth while they are still in high school, and its positive relationships with partners in providing services and leveraging services.” Specifically, RSA was impressed with the interagency agreements Maryland executed with four local school districts to ensure transitioning students have the necessary transition accommodations, namely, assistive technology and training on the technology for students with significant disabilities.

Maryland’s 2006 annual report provided limited data on transition-age youth. Maryland reported serving 4,606 students in 2004, 5,073 transitioning students in 2005, and 6,553 transitioning students in 2006, but gives no data on the total population served or the number of successful employment outcomes. Although DORS provides numerical and statistical data on its population, the total number served does not match

between categories. For instance, DORS reports serving 13,251 males and 11,636 females for a total of 24,887 consumers. DORS also reports serving 12,154 whites, 11,936 African-Americans, 1,314 other races, and 225 nonidentified races, for a total of 25,629 consumers. Thus, the numbers and statistics provided by DORS should be considered approximations. Yet, when RSA reviewed 15 service records per year for 2004, 2005, and 2006 to determine the accuracy of the RSA 911 data reporting, they had accuracy ratings of 94.44 percent for FY 2004 and 95.87 percent for FYs 2005 and 2006. RSA considers data accuracy a strength of Maryland DORS.

Educational institutions provided 4,921 (20 percent) of the DORS referrals, second only to individual self-referral (7,631 or 31 percent). A total of 29 percent of individuals referred were under age 22 at the time of referral; 22 percent were under age 20. Maryland DORS reports that 71 students participated in five geographically and programmatically different technical programs throughout the state, but provides no outcome data. Maryland DORS reports exceeding its goal for transitioning youth served through the Workforce and Technology Center by 17 percent.

Nebraska. Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation (NVR) assists schools in planning for the transition of students with disabilities “upon request...during their school years to the extent determined by cooperative agreements with local school districts” (RSA-NE, 2007). This plan results from Nebraska’s “strong tradition of local control” for its 300+ local school districts offering secondary education. NVR further notes that its districts are small, often enrolling fewer than 100 secondary students, of whom approximately 10 would have disabilities (RSA-NE, 2007).

RSA-NE (2007) recognizes NVR for its awarding of scholarships to transition-age VR-eligible youth. The youth are given internships lasting up to 12 weeks, for which NVR pays half the costs. The employer acts as a mentor and teacher, giving the youth necessary job and job-specific skills and, ultimately, the job. The success of this initiative prompted the NVR goal of “creating a minimum of 30 employer scholarships statewide for transition students with a minimum of 14 employers offering scholarships by September 30, 2008.”

Over 30 percent of NVR consumers are transition-age youth (RSA-NE, 2007, p. 14). Collaboration between NVR and the Nebraska Department of Education (NDOE) is guaranteed, with the transition program director position being jointly funded by NVR and NDOE. NVR provides services to groups of transition-age youth even prior to their eligibility determination. Their notable 18-page publication, “Arranging Transition Services with Vocational Rehabilitation: A Guide for Educators,” details these and many other aspects of transition and the process of transition. Each of NVR’s teams has a transition counselor who interacts with the adult counselor regularly, making the transition from potentially eligible youth to eligible consumer seamless. Despite this, NVR does not have access to NDOE data on such items as graduation rates and postsecondary education rates (RSA-NE, 2007, p. 15).

In its 2006 annual report, Nebraska provides essentially no data related to transition-age youth. RSA, in its 2007 monitoring report on Nebraska, identified this as an issue, creating for NVR this September 30, 2008, goal: “Develop a system for measuring success of transition-age youth.” NVR shares this goal (RSA-NE, 2007, p. 14). Yet, RSA deems NVR as providing “exemplary transition services, but [lacking] sufficient resources to make these services available in every school to all youth with disabilities who could benefit from them.”

Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania reports that during the 2004–2005 school year, 148,030 children ages 12–17 were enrolled in special education in the Commonwealth. Of those, 54,715 students were between the ages of 16 and 21 and eligible for transition services. Transition-age youth comprised 26.55 percent of the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) 2006 caseload, a total of 5,033 people. Pennsylvania employs an order of selection with the following priorities: (1) Most Significantly Disabled; (2) Significantly Disabled; and (3) Non-significantly Disabled (RSA-PA, 2007).

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) established by the governor’s Executive Order in 1998 and reconfirmed and advanced in 2006 created the Pennsylvania Community on Transition—State Leadership Team (RSA-PA, 2007). This MOU results in the collaboration of four agencies: Department of Education;

Department of Labor and Industry; Department of Public Welfare; and Department of Health. OVR participated in and “significantly contributed to the development and implementation of more than 40 transition programs” (RSA-PA, 2007). Additionally, OVR actively participates in more than 70 Local Transition Coordinating Councils throughout the state. Despite this, RSA identifies “improving the rehabilitation rate of transition-age youth” as one of OVR’s three challenging areas (RSA-PA, 2007, p. 4). Further, RSA (2007) cites OVR’s concerns about tracking youth who participate in the Community on Transition’s programs (p. 12).

RSA-PA (2007) reports that between 2002 and 2006, OVR served 25.76 percent of the total transition-age population. In 2002 they served 25.89 percent and in 2006 they served 26.55 percent, a 0.66 percent increase with a range of 1.54 percent over those five years. RSA-PA (2007) reports that between 2002 and 2006, OVR’s employment rate for transition-age youth served averaged 62.78 percent, with a range of 10.63 percent. The 2002 employment rate was 67.86 percent and the 2006 employment rate was 59.45 percent, a decrease of 8.41 percent. In 2005, Pennsylvania’s youth who received special education, who are ages 16–24 and who had successful competitive labor market closures through VR, worked 28.21 hours per week compared with the national mean of 29.28 hours per week, and earned a weekly average of \$215.50 compared with the national mean of \$224.04 (Institute for Community Inclusion, n.d.).

RSA (2007) reports that in FY 2006, 1,288 young people were “closed after determination of eligibility for services without an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) being developed, or after development of the IPE without receiving services” (RSA-PA, 2007, p. 12). To improve, OVR strives to hire a transition coordinator, develop and implement common data elements with their collaborating partners, and analyze their collaborative success through data analysis (RSA-PA, 2007, p. 12).

Through input from OVR and stakeholders, RSA-PA (2007) identified 17 issues related to performance and compliance. Notable among these issues are counselor

vacancies and large caseloads; communication with referral sources; need for training VR program participants in the use of assistive technology prior to entering college; merit scholarships in computing costs for college programs; and long-term employment support and outcome-based contracting (RSA-PA, 2007).

As noted above, these states are identified by RSA as having “promising practices.” A review of data on **Table 18** from the RSA FY 2006 Annual Review Report indicates that in general these states generated closure outcomes for transition-age students that met or exceeded national averages.

TABLE 18
Transition Performance Indicators from Selected States

Closure Performance— Transition population	AL - Combined 2006	MD - Combined 2006	NE - General 2006	PA - Combined 2006	National Averages 2006
Employment rate	71.83%	76.07%	65.95%	59.45%	57.88%
Percentage of transition-age served to total served	43.25%	25.65%	31.13%	26.55%	26.99%
Percentage with competitive employment	99.42%	99.19%	99.80%	98.50%	98.01%
Percentage closed with competitive employment with a significant disability	88.93%	100.00%	100.00%	99.97%	94.53%
Percentage closed with competitive employment at 35 or more hours per week	57.05%	51.10%	71.98%	60.06%	55.40%
Percentage closed with competitive employment at SGA level at 35 or more hours per week	54.52%	50.64%	70.96%	59.08%	54.47%
Percentage closed with competitive employment with employer-provided medical insurance	18.66%	20.67%	38.65%	31.66%	27.057%

Source: RSA FY 2006 Annual Review Report.

When analyzing the efficacy of the promising practices identified by RSA and reported above, it is important to note that RSA has not conducted rigorous impact analyses on the success and efficacy of these programs. RSA does not recommend these programs as highly effective overall, but indicates that the identified programs may represent states that are proactively working to develop innovative practices. The individual state data reported do not allow a comprehensive impact analysis to be completed. In some instances, improvements in employment outcomes (employment rate, wages, hours worked per week) are reported for program participants and compared to outcomes in the overall population. In other instances, comparisons are made between outcomes achieved by program participants and program outcomes in prior years.

Additional information is necessary to fully assess the efficacy of the state VR programs. These analyses should compare preprogram outcomes of participants to those of comparison group members to test for selection bias. In addition, the data described (employment rate, wages, and hours per week) is directly affected by local economic conditions. This information is not readily available. However, the results of these identified programs are sufficient to justify recommendation for future research that would include comprehensive evaluation studies of state-based promising practices that hold potential for widespread replication.

Summary of Key Findings of Research Question 5

OSERS and RSA have consistently attempted to promote improved transition outcomes for adolescents and young adults with disabilities. Recent efforts have focused on the identification and dissemination of new or innovative practices being used in individual states. However, the lack of rigorous research and evaluation approaches significantly limits the ability of VR agencies to identify programs and practices that may be associated with superior employment outcomes. Despite a long history of leadership in this area, OSERS and RSA have conducted very few rigorous efficacy studies to determine the effect of specific service delivery practices on the transition population.

CHAPTER 6: Emerging Trends in Transition from School to Employment and Postsecondary Education

In addition to collaborative efforts of state and local VR and special education agencies, a number of other trends are emerging at the policy and programmatic levels that are becoming the focus of federal and state initiatives. Several of the trends are discussed below.

Postsecondary Education

Trends in enrollment of students with disabilities in two- and four-year programs continue to increase, with some estimates ranging from 9.3 percent to as high as 17 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000; NCD, 2000). In spite of this increase, individuals with disabilities still remain less likely to pursue postsecondary education when compared to individuals without disabilities (Whelley, Hart, & Zaft, 2002). Although the gap for high school completion is closing between individuals with and without disabilities, this trend is not the case in higher education. In fact, completion of some college coursework has declined from 30 percent to 26 percent from 1986 until 2001. Earning a college degree has dropped during this same time period from 19 percent to 12 percent (National Organization on Disability, 2001). Contributing to the lack of persistence and retention of college students with disabilities is the issue of their adapting to an entirely new set of challenges in managing their academic program. Such a student now becomes one of potentially hundreds of students seeking services through a Disability Support Services office on campus. They are responsible for requesting their supports and services, providing documentation to receive these accommodations, and interacting with faculty to implement their supports.

Adjusting to a college environment presents challenges for all students; however, for students with disabilities, the responsibility of managing their accommodations along with their academic coursework presents a set of challenges unique to these students. Often students with disabilities enter college unprepared to disclose their disability, or they lack the understanding of how to access services on campus. Students with

disabilities must self-identify to the university to request accommodations and supports. Students decide for varying reasons not to self-disclose. Some students are anxious for a “new beginning” in an educational setting by not having to deal with being labeled. Others decide to wait to disclose until they are experiencing academic problems. In too many instances students with disabilities are made to feel that they do not belong in advanced degree programs because of their need to self-identify for specific services. As a result, students may elect not to disclose their disability to the university in order to avoid being labeled (Burgstahler & Doe, 2006; Getzel & McManus, 2005; National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports [NCSPEs], 2000). These attitudes by faculty and other university staff could result from their lack of understanding of students’ needs or familiarity with campus services (Getzel & McManus, 2005; Scott, 1996).

As a result of the increasing number of students with disabilities seeking opportunities in postsecondary education, several options for educating these students are being developed, implemented, and evaluated. There remains an ongoing need to explore the services and supports that can assist students with disabilities; however, information on the effectiveness of these services is limited due to the insufficient research on best practices in postsecondary education (Moore, 2006). Essentially, there are four types of postsecondary education options. The first option is the traditional college experience with supports provided through the Disability Support Services office. There are specialized programs that are offered at some colleges and universities in conjunction with the services provided by this office. The next three options listed below are considered specialized programs that are designed for students with disabilities who are in need of more intensive services and supports (Hart, Grigal, Sax, Martinez, & Will, 2006; Hart, Zafft, & Zimbrich, 2003).

- 1) Mixed/hybrid Model: Students with disabilities are involved in social activities and/or academic classes with students without disabilities (for audit or credit). These students also participate in classes with other students with disabilities,

typically life skills or transition classes. Employment experiences are offered both on and off campus.

- 2) **Substantially Separate:** Students are on campus, but are in classes only with other students with disabilities. Access to socializing with students without disabilities is part of the model. Employment experiences typically in pre-established employment settings on and off campus.
- 3) **Inclusive Individual Support Model:** Students receive individualized services (i.e., educational coach, tutor, technology) and are enrolled in college classes, certificate programs, and/or degree programs (for credit or audit). This model is not program based but is integrated into the existing college structure—for example, courses are selected on students' career goals and employment experiences include internships, apprenticeships, or work-based learning.

Financial Literacy and Asset Accumulation

An emerging trend in transition programs for secondary and postsecondary students with disabilities is the growing emphasis on financial literacy and asset accumulation. This trend is arising from an increased realization that in addition to enabling students to increase their income through employment, transition programs should assist individuals to leverage available paths to asset development through a series of educational and support services that ensure long-term success.

As the national financial system becomes increasingly complex, it places even more responsibility on individuals to manage the details of their own finances. In response, there is a growing emphasis in educational circles on developing and implementing financial literacy curricula. While many different curricula have been developed to promote financial literacy among children and adolescents, only recently have efforts been made to modify these curricula for youth with disabilities. Examples include the work of the Jump Start Coalition (<http://www.jumpstartcoalition.org>) and a

financial literacy curriculum available from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC).

In addition to the emphasis on promoting financial literacy among youth with disabilities, in recent years there has been a growing emphasis on asset-development strategies to help youth with disabilities avoid lifelong dependence on federal and state disability benefit programs. These approaches attempt to move beyond outdated methods for helping people move out of poverty that were based solely upon income supports. Asset accumulation focuses on encouraging people to save money and invest in assets that increase in value over time.

A good example of the shift in disability policy away from income support to asset development is the advent of individualized development accounts, or IDAs. These are special accounts that allow members of low-income groups to save for specific goals such as home ownership, employment, small business ownership, or education while also receiving matching funds and financial counseling. The deposits are matched, usually by a combination of government and private sector funds, at rates that vary from 1:1 to 8:1; depending on the program and the availability of funds.

IDAs are currently most widely available to youth with disabilities through the Assets for Independence Act (AFIA) program. Participants use earnings from work to set up an approved bank account for an IDA. Any earnings an individual contributes to an AFIA IDA are deducted from wages when determining countable income for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) purposes. State matching funds that are deposited in an AFIA IDA are also excluded from income as well as any interest earned on the individual's own contributions.

Social Security Administration Youth Transition Initiatives

Until very recently, adolescents and young adults who received Supplemental Security Income (SSI) through the Social Security Administration (SSA) were often considered unlikely candidates for VR services. Disincentives in the SSA programs created

significant obstacles to employment and program participation, based on the view that beneficiaries would be unwilling to pursue employment for fear of jeopardizing their federal payments. In response to these concerns, SSA has developed and implemented a number of program reforms that are designed to promote employment among transition-age beneficiaries. Two of these provisions, which have dramatic implications for transition-to-work programs, are the Student Earned Income Exclusion and the Section 301 provisions related to program participation. In addition, SSA has initiated a new service program, termed Work Incentives Planning and Assistance, that can provide adolescents and young adults receiving SSA benefits with the information and support necessary to pursue their career goals.

Section 301

In many instances, adolescents who receive SSI benefits during their youth lose those benefits when they turn 18 and are reevaluated using the more stringent adult eligibility criteria. However, disability benefit payments may continue even though the student is not found to meet the adult definition of disability if eligibility can be established for "Section 301" status. Section 301 refers to several parts of the Social Security Act that allow continued disability benefits under certain circumstances to individuals who no longer meet the disability standard.

Prior to June 2005, payment of benefits under Section 301 was highly restrictive. It required that the beneficiary be actively participating in an approved vocational rehabilitation program before the determination of ineligibility. Further, SSA had to determine that continued participation in the VR program was likely to result in permanent removal from the disability rolls. The 2005 regulatory changes allowed the criterion of an "approved program" to include participation in school for students ages 18 to 22 as long as the student receives services under an IEP or an individualized transition plan (ITP). This provision allows adolescents to continue to receive the financial supports they need as they prepare for postsecondary education or employment.

Student Earned Income Exclusion

The Student Earned Income Exclusion, or SEIE, is an SSI work incentive that allows individuals who are under the age of 22 who regularly attend school to exclude (as of January 2006) up to \$1,550 of earned income per month (up to a maximum of \$6,240 per year). This exclusion is applied before any other exclusion. Earnings received prior to the month of eligibility do not count toward the \$6,240 annual limit. These amounts will be automatically adjusted on an annual basis based on the cost of living. The SEIE allows young adults to earn significant amounts while building a work history and developing confidence in their ability to be independent and economically self-sufficient.

Work Incentives Planning and Assistance for Youth with Disabilities

Social Security benefits serve as a valuable resource to eligible students as they transition from school to adult life. These benefit programs offer not only cash payments and health insurance but also include numerous work incentives specifically designed to increase employment and earnings capacity during and after secondary education. Failure to focus on Social Security benefits during transition is not just a missed opportunity, but may also cause harm when students and family members are not educated about or prepared for the effect of earnings on cash benefits and medical insurance.

The impact of Social Security benefits on transition-age youth is seldom considered by VR and special education programs during the formal transition planning process. Fortunately, a new program supported by the Social Security Administration can help address this concern. The Ticket to Work and Work Incentive Improvement Act created a whole new service called Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA). SSA recognized that many beneficiaries who might otherwise be able to work were choosing not to out of fear of benefit loss. While the work incentives built into the disability programs make it quite possible to work and gradually reduce dependence on benefits, nobody seemed to be aware of these provisions or understand how they worked. Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICs) now provide beneficiaries with disabilities (including youth in the transition-to-work age) access to individualized

benefits counseling services to help them understand the effect of paid employment on cash benefits and public health insurance.

Dropout Prevention

Much has been written about prevention programs for students without disabilities. There is also limited information about explaining the reasons why students with and without disabilities drop out of school. While some factors associated with dropping out cannot be controlled (socioeconomic and racial minority status), other factors are more amendable to interventions: absenteeism, course failure, and peer influences (Scanlon & Mellard, 2002). There are few experimental, evidence-based intervention studies directly investigating dropout prevention or school completion, and even fewer for students with disabilities (Lehr, Hansen, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2003). Most studies are nonexperimental and descriptive; these, though valuable, are not the studies upon which policymakers and practitioners should rely (Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005).

In 2007, What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) summarized its findings for 59 studies of 16 dropout prevention programs. Of these, 16 studies of 11 programs met their evidence standards, 7 without reservations and 9 with reservations. The 11 remaining programs were evaluated on three domains: staying in school, progressing in school, and completing school. On these domains, the Check and Connect and the Achievement for Latinos Through Academic Success (ALAS) programs had positive or potentially positive effects on staying in school and on progressing in school for students with disabilities (WWC, 2007). Programs with minimal or no discernable effects were Financial Incentives for Teen Parents to Stay in School, High School Redirection, Middle College High School, Project GRAD, Quantum Opportunity Program, Talent Development High Schools, Talent Search, and Twelve Together (WWC, 2007).

Check and Connect

Check and Connect was originally funded in the early 1990s by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). In 2005, Sinclair, Christenson, and Thurlow reported their study of Check and Connect. Check and

Connect intends to promote student engagement for urban high school students with emotional or behavioral disabilities.

The “check” component of the model refers to the continuous and systematic assessment of student levels of engagement with the school (e.g., attendance, suspensions, grades, credits). The “connect” component refers to timely and individualized intervention focused on students’ educational progress, guided by the check indicators, and provided by program staff in partnership with school personnel, family members, and community workers (Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005).

The longitudinal study of 144 predominantly African-American males experienced lower rates of dropout and mobility, higher rates of persistent attendance and enrollment status in school, and more comprehensive transition plans (Sinclair et al., 2005). Further, Check and Connect is an otherwise empirically supported model with demonstrated effectiveness for students with and without disabilities, in elementary, middle, and high school, and in urban and suburban communities (Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005, citing Lehr, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004).

Achievement for Latinos Through Academic Success

Achievement for Latinos Through Academic Success (ALAS) was developed to prevent high-risk Latino students with and without disabilities from dropping out of school. WWC (2007) describes the four fundamental aspects of the program:

- Students receive social problem-solving training, counseling, increased and specific recognition of academic excellence, and enhancement of school affiliation.
- Schools are responsible for providing frequent teacher feedback to students and parents and attendance monitoring. In addition, schools are expected to provide training for students in problem-solving and social skills.
- Parents of program participants receive training in school participation, accessing and using community resources, and how to guide and monitor adolescents.

- Collaboration with the community is encouraged through increased interaction between community agencies and families. Efforts to enhance skills and methods for serving the youth and family are also implemented.

WWC (2007) reported that program participants had lower rates of absenteeism, lower percentages of failed classes, and a higher proportion of credits (on track to graduate) when compared to nonparticipants.

Self-Employment

Traditionally, VR agencies have been reluctant to promote and support self-employment as an appropriate employment option for individuals with disabilities who have limited prior employment experience (Arnold & Ipsen, 2003). For example, in FY 2006, self-employment accounted for less than 2 percent of all VR Status 26 closures. In recent years, both RSA and the U.S. Department of Labor have begun to promote self-employment as a viable alternative to wage employment for individuals with very limited prior work histories (Arnold & Ipsen, 2003). Very recently, VR and special education programs have begun to focus on self-employment as a potential transition outcome for youth with disabilities.

Self-employment may offer several advantages for youth with disabilities. First, self-employment alternatives may allow adolescents and their families to pursue employment options that more clearly match their skills, interests, and vocational goals. Second, it may enable individuals to pursue meaningful employment in situations where lack of job opportunities, lack of stable transportation, or other factors may make it very difficult for an individual to access satisfying wage employment. Third, a number of federal initiatives have been developed to promote self-employment. The HHS Asset for Independence program, the SSA Property Essential for Self-Support (PESS) work incentive, and the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) Small Business and Self-Employment Services program all provide resources and support for adolescents and young adults attempting to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

Veterans Services

An emerging issue in transition to employment and postsecondary education is the increasing numbers of young men and women ages 18 to 24 returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with disabilities. Because of the nature of these conflicts, mental illness and traumatic brain injury (TBI) are very common disabilities among these men and women.

Seal, Bertenthal, and Miner (2007) at the University of California, San Francisco, and San Francisco Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center examined data from a VA database, including 103,788 veterans of these operations who were first seen at VA facilities between September 30, 2001, and September 30, 2005. About 13 percent were women, 54 percent were younger than age 30, close to one-third were minorities, and almost one-half were veterans of the National Guard or Reserves rather than full-time military personnel.

A total of 32,010 (31 percent) received mental health and/or psychosocial diagnoses, including 25,658 (25 percent) who received mental health diagnoses (56 percent of whom had two or more diagnoses). The most common such diagnosis was PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder); the 13,205 veterans with this disorder represented 52 percent of those receiving mental health diagnoses and 13 percent of all the veterans in the study. The study found that the youngest group of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans (ages 18–24 years) were at greatest risk for receiving mental health or post-traumatic stress disorder diagnoses.

Now and for the coming decades, larger proportions of veterans will be more likely to return from Iraq and Afghanistan with a TBI due to the use of improvised explosive devices as weapons of war and terror. However, it is equally important to recognize that military personnel in both combat and noncombat posts are at high risk for sustaining a TBI (Ommaya et al., 1996; Okie, 2005). One study, for example, found that 23 percent of noncombat, active-duty soldiers at Fort Bragg (n=2,276) sustained a TBI during their military service (Ivins et al., 2003).

A complex array of medical services, cash benefits, and other specialized programs are available to serve and support veterans of the U.S. armed forces who experience disabilities. The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) awards and administers some benefits provided to veterans, while the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) governs others. In addition, the current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have involved the deployment of an unprecedented number of men and women who are members of the National Guard or military Reserves. These veterans have significant past involvement in the civilian workforce and are often eligible for a whole separate system of disability benefits provided by the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

Unlike Social Security disability programs, the DoD and VA benefits systems do not include incentives for recipients to attempt employment while receiving benefits. In fact, Wehman, Gentry, West, and Arango-Lasprilla (in press) identify a number of significant disincentives to employment within the two systems. For example, cash disability benefits are reduced dollar for dollar with earned income. In addition, an attempt at employment may trigger a reevaluation of the veteran's disability status, which could result in loss or reduction of benefits.

The DoD and VA disability benefit programs are appropriately intended to provide compensation for lost earnings capacity caused by the injury or illness the service member incurred while serving our country. The veterans benefits are meant to replace the wages which otherwise would have been earned if the disability had not been incurred. However, the programs are based on a flawed premise that fails to distinguish between the concept of disability in the context of military duty from the potential of veterans to acquire and maintain employment in the civilian workforce. In addition, the ratings system used by the military assumes that it is possible to objectively quantify the economic impact that various disabling conditions have upon individuals in the civilian workforce. Neither of these assumptions is valid in light of what is known about how to accommodate disability in the workplace and how to structure benefit programs in order to promote employment.

Because of these flawed assumptions and employment disincentives within the DoD and VA benefits systems, young transition-age veterans with disabilities face significant obstacles to entering or returning to civilian employment, perhaps more so than individuals with disabilities who are receiving Social Security disability benefits. Any successful community reintegration initiative focused on young veterans with disabilities must include an intensive analysis of the impact of paid employment or self-employment on DoD and VA disability benefits, as well as any other public benefits veterans may receive based upon disability. To the extent that earnings from employment may jeopardize a veteran's program eligibility or cash benefit amount, it will make it far less likely that an individual will choose to pursue employment. If veterans with disabilities perceive employment as risky, in terms of its adverse impact on essential cash benefits, rental assistance, health insurance, or other special programs, they may elect to protect their benefits instead of pursuing employment.

CHAPTER 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

While the public sector VR program has been providing employment-related services to young adults with disabilities for decades, and currently serves more than 50,000 youth each year, the results of the study confirm that relatively little is known about the extent and effectiveness of VR transition services. As a result, state VR agencies continue to devote substantial resources to this population without the benefit of methodologically sound evaluation approaches that can be used to assess the long-term impact of services on the employment status and economic self-sufficiency, validated evidence-based service delivery approaches that form the basis of program planning, or systematic procedures for identifying new promising practices.

The ever-increasing number of transition-age youth who will exit secondary special education programs and attempt to enter the workforce over the next decade will create tremendous challenges for VR agencies. While many current service delivery approaches hold promise, little empirical information is available that will allow VR agencies to accurately predict the amount and type of services required to assist transition-age youth to meet their employment goals, or the outcomes that should be anticipated for individuals served through the program.

A lack of comprehensive evaluation methodologies makes it difficult for VR agencies to identify programs and practices that may be associated with superior employment outcomes, as well as the consumer characteristics that mediate or moderate these outcomes. Despite decades of focus on transition-age youth, agencies and other organizations have conducted very few efficacy studies to determine whether specific service delivery practices are successful with this population. In addition, it should be recognized that in some areas the field even lacks viable promising practices that can be scientifically validated through experimental research. In these instances, research efforts should focus on the development of potentially effective rehabilitation interventions that can subsequently undergo rigorous testing.

The recommendations offered below are divided into two main categories. Seven recommendations address changes to current service delivery practices that are designed to improve transition outcomes for youth with disabilities. These recommendations are derived directly from data collected through the series of structured interviews and review of promising practices and are consistent with the quantitative data reported above. In addition, four recommendations are offered to guide future research in a way that will lead to valid data that can be used to assess the success of further services, validate evidence-based practices, and create new service delivery approaches.

Recommendations to Improve VR Transition Outcomes Through Changes in Current Service Delivery Practices

Recommendations for the U.S. Congress

- 1. Congress should change existing VR transition legislation and policy to require that VR services be made available to eligible youth no later than three years before an adolescent or young adult exits from secondary education.** Many promising practices are based on the concept that early intervention by VR will impact the educational and vocational experiences of adolescents and help prevent early exit from school. Additionally, interventions focused on adolescents three years before exiting school are more likely to be of sufficient intensity and duration to have significant impacts on the employment outcomes of these individuals.
- 2. Congress should authorize and allocate sufficient funds to support the development of a multifunctional transition unit in each state VR agency.** These units would be responsible for coordinating policy and service delivery across all agencies involved in the transition process, developing and delivering staff development to VR transition counselors, monitoring and evaluating the efficacy of new and ongoing service initiatives, and other related functions.

3. **Congress should authorize and mandate the development and implementation of coordinated service delivery approaches, specifically targeted to transitioning youth with disabilities, that are based on the “blending” of funds from VR, special education, postsecondary education, Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), Veterans Administration, Social Security Administration, and other appropriate funding agencies.** These blended approaches, such as the WIA Shared Youth Vision Collaborative Partnership, should be designed and delivered as formal demonstrations that would rigorously test the effectiveness of these intervention models. The programs should be developed with sufficient resources to first validate their efficacy in local communities within areas of an individual state, and then if successful, to expand to “full-scale” statewide demonstrations that determine the effectiveness of the interventions in multiple settings under varying conditions.
4. **Congress should mandate that RSA, NIDRR, and state VR agencies conduct rigorous evaluation studies that identify the transition program components that directly correlate with improved employment and postsecondary educational outcomes for transition-age youth.** These studies should focus specifically on the intensity and duration of VR involvement in the transition process and specifically examine the differential effects of the delivery of IPE documented services versus other types of services. RSA’s long-term reliance on program evaluation based on descriptive information and short-term outcomes does not allow a methodologically sound evaluation of the efficacy or cost-effectiveness of the program. The approach will require these agencies to conduct net impact analyses that compare the employment and educational outcomes of participants in a specific transition intervention with those of a statistically validated comparison group to determine, over significant periods of time, the net impact of VR service provision on young adults with disabilities.

5. **Congress should mandate and allocate funds to support the implementation of rigorous evaluation studies designed to establish the efficacy of fully developed transition programs, practices, and policies.** RSA, NIDRR, OSEP, and state VR agencies should engage in collaborative research activities that will lead to the development of new evidence-based practices. While in a number of areas promising practices exist, very few efficacy studies have been conducted to determine whether these practices are successful with transition-age young adults. As a result, it is difficult for VR agencies to identify programs and practices that may be associated with superior employment and education outcomes, as well as the individual student or program characteristics that mediate or moderate these outcomes.

Recommendations for the U.S. Department of Education: RSA, NIDRR, OSEP, and State VR Agencies

6. **RSA, NIDRR, and state VR agencies should develop, implement, and evaluate new service unit policies under which the services provided by VR counselors outside the individualized plan for employment (IPE), such as time spent in collaboration with other agencies, secondary and postsecondary schools, families, etc., are recognized as service units comparable to IPE services.** VR transition services often lead to improved academic performance, dropout reduction, and increased work experience. However, these outcomes are often not included in VR performance reporting. Therefore, in some instances, counselors may be reluctant to provide these services.
7. **RSA, NIDRR, and state VR agencies should design, implement, and evaluate a tiered structure for services delivered by VR counselors working with transition-age youth.** Identification and recognition that transition outcomes and time frames are different than adult VR outcomes will lead to the development of differing outcome levels for services provided to those 14–15

years old than those 16 and above, with the last tier being the final year of high school when traditional VR transition services are usually provided.

8. **RSA and state VR agencies should allocate additional staff development resources for the preparation of current and future rehabilitation counselors to meet the needs of transition-age youth, and target recruitment and professional development activities to attract qualified people with disabilities to the field.** Current personnel preparation efforts are not able to fully equip all VR transition counselors and adult counselors with the knowledge and skills necessary to address the complex support needs of the young adults with disabilities exiting school. These staff-development efforts should be based on comprehensive needs assessment and competency-based training programs that empirically identify the professional characteristics and qualifications needed for success as a VR transition counselor or adult counselor working with transition-age youth.
9. **RSA should coordinate its secondary transition efforts with those of other federal and state agencies implementing dropout prevention programs.** Dropout rates for students with disabilities remain high, ultimately restricting the economic self-sufficiency of millions of young adults and promoting lifelong dependence on federal and state benefit programs. VR involvement with transition-age youth should be viewed as a potential key component of dropout prevention efforts. RSA should coordinate its transition efforts with those of other agencies in the Department of Education attempting to implement successful dropout prevention programs for all secondary students, including those with disabilities.
10. **RSA, NIDRR, OSEP, and state VR agencies should collaborate to conduct a comprehensive review of existing VR transition programs, practices, and policies being implemented in each individual state.** Current RSA monitoring activities should increase their focus on state VR services targeted toward transition-age youth. Effective policies and practices identified through this

monitoring and evaluation process should be disseminated across state VR agencies to promote improved service delivery.

11. **RSA, NIDRR, OSEP, and state VR agencies should conduct a systematic program of future research to identify the characteristics and service needs of transition-age youth with disabilities currently unserved or underserved by VR.** These underserved groups may include individuals with autism, people from diverse cultural or linguistic backgrounds, veterans with disabilities, and many other groups. Research should focus on determining eligibility and providing appropriate services and supports. Testing the validity of the efficacy of any interventions delivered through rigorous evaluation studies that adequately sample all relevant populations will be extremely important.

Endnotes

ⁱ Information taken from state-specific reports prepared by RSA on the results of monitoring reviews. Retrieved June 26, 2008, from <http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/rehab/107-reports/2007/index.html>.

ⁱⁱ “Promising Practices for Basic VR Agencies Helping Transitioning Youth” can be viewed at <http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/rehab/promising-practices/transition-age/index.html>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Performance indicator 1.5 concerns the average earnings of all the individuals who exit the VR program and enter into competitive, self-, or Business Enterprise Program (BEP) employment with earnings equivalent to at least the minimum wage as a ratio of the state’s average hourly earnings for all individuals in the state who are employed (as derived from the Bureau of Labor Statistics report, State Average Annual Pay, for the most recent available year).

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Appendix A

Comparison of the Organization of Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title IV of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998

Rehabilitation Act of 1973	WIA: Title IV—Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998
	Sec. 401. Short title
	Sec. 402. Title
	Sec. 403. General provisions
Title I – VR Services	Sec. 404. Vocational rehabilitation services
Title II – Research and Training	Sec. 405. Research and training
Title III – Professional Development and Special Projects and Demonstrations	Sec. 406. Professional development and special projects and demonstrations
Title IV – National Council on Disability	Sec. 407. National Council on Disability
Title V – Rights and Advocacy	Sec. 408. Rights and advocacy
Title VI – Employment Opportunities for Individuals with Disabilities	Sec. 409. Employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities
Title VII – Independent Living Services and Centers for Independent Living	Sec. 410. Independent living services and centers for independent living
	Sec. 411. Repeal
	Sec. 412. Helen Keller National Center Act
Mentioned throughout (e.g., Sec. 501)	Sec. 413. President's Committee on Employment of People With Disabilities
	Sec. 414. Conforming amendments
Source: http://www.ed.gov/policy/speced/reg/narrative.html	Source: http://www.doleta.gov/regs/statutes/wialaw.txt ; http://www.doleta.gov/USWORKFORCE/WIA/wialaw.txt

Appendix B

Titles and Sections of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 that Address Programs and Services Applicable to Transition-Age Youth

Title/Section	Program	Additional Information
Title I	One Stop Career Centers	Youth ages 18–21 may be co-enrolled as both youth and adults to receive job search and more intensive services, including training.
Title I, B, and Title IV, Subtitle D	Youth Service Programs	Eligible youth ages 14–21 who require assistance to complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment.
Title I, C	Residential Training—Job Corps	There is no upper age limit for eligible youth with disabilities (service eligibility usually range from ages 14 to 24). In 2008 there are 118 Job Corps Centers nationwide.
Title II	Adult Literacy Programs	Youth over the age of 16 who are not currently enrolled in school and who lack a high school diploma or the basic skills to function effectively can receive basic education opportunities.

Source: NCWD/Youth, 2008

Appendix C

Panel of Experts

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services

Jennifer Sheehy—NIDRR
Hugh Berry—OSERS
Leslie Caplan—NIDRR
Marlene Simon-Burroughs—OSEP
Edward Anthony—RSA

U.S. Department of Labor

Gregg Weltz—ETA Youth Services
Rhonda Basha—ODEP

Social Security Administration

Jamie Kendall—OPDR

State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency

Erica Lovelace—VA DRS

Business Community

Debra Ruh – TECACCESS (also Parent Advocate)

Disability-Related Organizations

Paul Seifert—CSAVR
Theresa Boyd—PVA
Curtis Richards—EL

Parent Advocates

Cathy Healy—PEATC

Transition-Age Youth

Ryan Easterly
Sara Ruh
Michael Smith

Researchers in Transition Issues

David Wittenburg—MPR
Nanette Goodman—Private Consultant

Appendix D

Mission of the National Council on Disability

Overview and Purpose

The National Council on Disability (NCD) is an independent federal agency with 15 members appointed by the President of the United States and confirmed by the U.S. Senate. The purpose of NCD is to promote policies, programs, practices, and procedures that guarantee equal opportunity for all individuals with disabilities regardless of the nature or significance of the disability and to empower individuals with disabilities to achieve economic self-sufficiency, independent living, and inclusion and integration into all aspects of society.

Specific Duties

The current statutory mandate of NCD includes the following:

- Reviewing and evaluating, on a continuing basis, policies, programs, practices, and procedures concerning individuals with disabilities conducted or assisted by federal departments and agencies, including programs established or assisted under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, or under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, as well as all statutes and regulations pertaining to federal programs that assist such individuals with disabilities, to assess the effectiveness of such policies, programs, practices, procedures, statutes, and regulations in meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities.
- Reviewing and evaluating, on a continuing basis, new and emerging disability policy issues affecting individuals with disabilities in the Federal Government, at the state and local government levels, and in the private sector, including the need for and coordination of adult services, access to personal assistance services, school reform efforts and the impact of such efforts on individuals with

disabilities, access to health care, and policies that act as disincentives for individuals to seek and retain employment.

- Making recommendations to the President, Congress, the Secretary of Education, the director of the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, and other officials of federal agencies about ways to better promote equal opportunity, economic self-sufficiency, independent living, and inclusion and integration into all aspects of society for Americans with disabilities.
- Providing Congress, on a continuing basis, with advice, recommendations, legislative proposals, and any additional information that NCD or Congress deems appropriate.
- Gathering information about the implementation, effectiveness, and impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) (42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq.).
- Advising the President, Congress, the commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration, the assistant secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services within the Department of Education, and the director of the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research on the development of the programs to be carried out under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.
- Providing advice to the commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration with respect to the policies and conduct of the administration.
- Making recommendations to the director of the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research on ways to improve research, service, administration, and the collection, dissemination, and implementation of research findings affecting people with disabilities.
- Providing advice regarding priorities for the activities of the Interagency Disability Coordinating Council and reviewing the recommendations of this council for legislative and administrative changes to ensure that such recommendations are consistent with NCD's purpose of promoting the full integration, independence, and productivity of individuals with disabilities.

- Preparing and submitting to the President and Congress an annual report titled *National Disability Policy: A Progress Report*.

International

In 1995, NCD was designated by the Department of State to be the U.S. government's official contact point for disability issues. Specifically, NCD interacts with the special rapporteur of the United Nations Commission for Social Development on disability matters.

Consumers Served and Current Activities

Although many government agencies deal with issues and programs affecting people with disabilities, NCD is the only federal agency charged with addressing, analyzing, and making recommendations on issues of public policy that affect people with disabilities regardless of age, disability type, perceived employment potential, economic need, specific functional ability, veteran status, or other individual circumstance. NCD recognizes its unique opportunity to facilitate independent living, community integration, and employment opportunities for people with disabilities by ensuring an informed and coordinated approach to addressing the concerns of people with disabilities and eliminating barriers to their active participation in community and family life.

NCD plays a major role in developing disability policy in America. In fact, NCD originally proposed what eventually became ADA. NCD's present list of key issues includes education, transportation, emergency preparedness, international disability rights, employment, vocational rehabilitation, livable communities, and crime victims with disabilities.

Statutory History

NCD was established in 1978 as an advisory board within the Department of Education (P.L. 95-602). The Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1984 (P.L. 98-221) transformed NCD into an independent agency.

